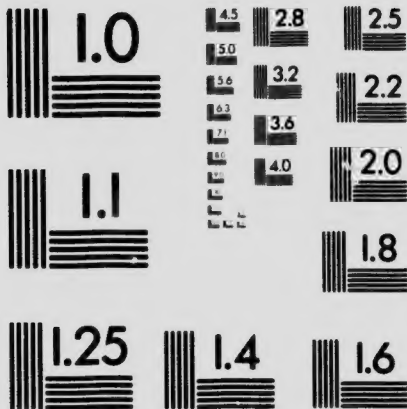


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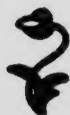
THE SHADOW OF THE MOSQUE

TO
MY MOTHER

THE SHADOW OF ..THE MOSQUE..

A Tale of Occupied Mesopotamia

.. By Morris McDougall ..



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*A glossary of native words will be found at the end
of the book.*

THE SHADOW OF THE MOSQUE

I

GALT COMES TO EL RAGI

GALT will not readily forget his entry into the desert town. He had been riding through ruins; the inhabitants of the ancient city had vanished long since, and were as dead as the flowers of their gardens, whose ghostly beds were still visible in dim outline; but here were the middle ages projected right into the present. There was nothing to suggest twentieth century in the whole town. The city wall with its bastions and loopholes, the narrow winding streets, the blank, featureless walls, with their few glassless barred windows, the massive, buttressed doors,—everything about El Ragi was, at first sight, slovenly, unfinished, cold, forbidding, mediæval. Galt had seen other Arab towns, but now he took in every detail with a keener interest than he had known before, for this was to be his home.

As Galt rode on through the narrow streets he grew grave and thoughtful, and he looked curiously at the people he passed. He had expected indifference,

the end

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but not this sullen antipathy. Ragged little urchins indeed came to a stiff soldierlike salute on an order "shun" from one of their number, (they were quick to learn these little fellows), and smiled and chatted among themselves as Galt good humouredly returned their salutations. Genuine friendship beamed from their grimy, fly covered, little faces. "The street Arab in his native habitat seems a decent friendly little devil," thought Galt. "But the elders! The town certainly hasn't brought out its brass band to welcome me, but then they didn't know I was coming, and I don't suppose they know who I am now." The men in ragged aba or richly embroidered zubun, coolie or merchant, the women in tatters or silk, brilliant aba, all gave him a wide berth. He felt puzzled and unaccountably uncomfortable before the level gaze of these patriarchal Arabs. He read hatred, but more than that, he read suspicion in their glances. At a turn in the street his eye caught the gleaming dome, flaming like a giant heliograph, and his ear the sonorous cry of the Muezzin, "La illaha illa Allah wa Muhammad er rasul Allah," and he nodded to himself, Islam, the Koran. His nostrils seemed to feel an arid breath from the desert, and yet the air was still. That hatred,—that suspicion was perhaps natural. It had been fostered in the shadow of that golden dome. He was the Infidel. "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." Sobered, but with an eye that looked unfaltering into the future, he rode on. His Office was not to be a sinecure. Then he smiled; to his thought had come the words of the fellow at the

Convalescent Depot, "The Political Officer is the Modern Caliph of Baghdad,"—not an unpleasant fancy.

A murmur rose in front of him, and the road debouched on a square which thronged with Arabs. He drew rein frowning. In the centre stood a gibbet, and from its gruesome, wooded framework hung two fluttering shapes. You can become quite callous in time to the sight of bodies lying stark and unlovely on the field, but there is something in the burden of the gallows that must make the gorge rise. It was a distinctly distasteful sight to one who had come to promote good relations with the Arabs. Through Galt's mind ran the words that had been dropped at G.H.Q., when he had received his instructions, and he frowned thoughtfully. "He is a fine clean-cut soldier, the Military Governor, but I fancy he's a shade too regimental for the Arabs." A shade too regimental for the Arabs! But Galt's face cleared almost immediately. No doubt these Arabs had been guilty of murder, robbery under arms or some kindred crime, and richly merited their punishment. Their bodies were left hanging in the public square as a salutary example. And yet . . .

Galt saw a Military Police Corporal and called him to his side.

"Robbery under arms, sir; robbed some Tommies of their rifles, sir. Killed one of them, a sentry I believe; serves them jolly well right, sir,—I say, jolly well right, the blighters, but it seems as if they don't mind nothing, them Arabs. Do you know, sir, they had a smile in their faces when they were jerked off

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their feet; it's a fact, sir. I don't understand them, I don't," and he shook his head in bewilderment.

"I don't understand them, I don't!" How much truth, thought Galt, lay behind that statement. So it was with the Briton, so with the Arab. Assuredly the punishment of the thieving assassins had been well merited, but in the glances of sullen suspicion Galt fancied he now read the question, "How are we to be sure that it is for crimes such as this only that we will receive such punishment? What are we to expect from infidels who follow not the Holy Laws of the Prophet?" They must be taught; they must be taught.

Whence he came Galt did not notice, but there he sat, a centaur in his saddle. He was not as tall as most Arabs; he was slightly obese, possibly from self indulgence, yet there was an unmistakeable air about him, a bearing of great dignity. In his youth, (he was apparently about middle age), he must have been strikingly handsome. Galt, unnoticed, watched the face with keen interest. It spoke unmistakeably of authority, wielded through long generations. Pride and cunning resource were there, and the confidence that comes of a life of combats, bitterly contested but usually won; and the lips,—they held Galt's eye,—were full, sensual, and the dip of their corners showed cruelty. It did not need the obsequious salutations of the people, nor the sight of the scarlet cloth saddle blanket, tasselled and trimmed with gold and beads and the wide heavy stirrups studded with gleaming stones, to convince Galt that this was the Sheikh of El Ragi.

"A man to be cultivated and watched." (So they had told him at G.H.Q.) "Cultivated, because it is half the battle for the political officer to work in harmony with the Sheikh." Galt knew this to be quite true, because of the immense power wielded by Sheikhs over their tribes. He knew of many Sheikhs who had proved strong, trustworthy allies of the British, and sincerely he hoped that the Sheikh of Ei Ragi might be added to their number. "And watched," they had said.

The eye of the Sheikh was on the dangling rags. Anger keen as a sword blade flashed from his eyes, and Galt saw the hands clenching his zubun. But suddenly his glance fell on Galt, and lo! sunlight instantly dispelled the clouds. What a transformation! Galt could not believe he had been frowning. He saluted, hand on breast, Turkish fashion, then quickly raised his hand to his brow, and rode his horse forward to Galt's side.

"You English know how to deal with criminals," he said smiling. There was just a touch of condescension in the voice. "Stern, unrelenting justice, Wallah, that is the only way to keep down crime. They are well out of the way, those dogs," and he snapped his fingers.

What was it in the eye that checked the reply on Galt's tongue?

"We Arabs are too lenient, you have taught us much, you English."

Too lenient! Galt thought of the maimed beggars in bazaars he had seen, who had been cruelly mutilated by Sheikhs, but he restrained the smile. The

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voice was cordial, the lips smiled, but those eyes . . . from their unplumbed, unguessed depths they were appraising Galt, and he felt for an instant like an awkward child before an elder.

"Ah!" the glance had fastened on the white and gold lapels, "the new Hakim el Siyasi." A momentary shadow passed across those eyes, like a ripple on a pool. "The hakuma is thoughtful, very thoughtful." He seemed to be speaking to himself. "It takes us under its wing like a rock pigeon its brood." Galt perceived a touch of irony in the voice. "We are not at war with the Arabs. We try to deal squarely with them and help them," he said sharply.

Galt felt the blood rising to his brow and was annoyed with himself for becoming flustered before this desert chieftain who was so completely master of his emotions. The Sheikh's smile broadened and he raised a deprecating hand.

"Wallah, have I not said so, O hakim?" The smile was blotted out; then with a pride so blatant as to be almost grotesque, yet somehow not laughable, he said solemnly, "I, Sheikh of the Beni Kelb, whom men call the Scorpion, whose fathers have been Sheikhs of this tribe since the hour when the Arab was master of the world, welcome thee, Yozbashi to El Ragi," and he stretched forth his hand. Saluting, his hand on his heart, he rode on. Galt had gravely returned his salute, and it was not until the moment after, that a slight smile played on his lip. "Apparently I am his guest and he is doing me a favour by allowing me to come to El Ragi." The idea would not have been an unpleasant one, for after

all this was the Arab's land, had it not been for those unsmiling eyes. Lurking in their shadows it seemed to Galt, there was another, the true man, who had perhaps come to the surface, when he had been watching the dangling bodies. Had it been rage against the crime or against the punishment that had flamed from those eyes? He turned his head, from the other side of the square, the Sheikh, statue like, was looking after him, erect, perhaps defiant, the hereditary ruler of his people, the true descendant of those Arabs who ten centuries before, fanned by the hot breath of the desert prophet's teaching, had swept a consuming fire across the world. "A man to be cultivated and watched."

II

GALT SEES SOME OF HIS CHILDREN

BEFORE him now was the door marked "Military Governor," with its Arabic equivalent in Arabic script "Hakim El Askeri"; beneath a Sikh sentry with turban and kammerbund, his silky beard encased in its almost invisible net, came like a ramrod to attention, to the slope, and slapped his hands resoundingly on the butt of his rifle. Beyond the gate another guard was on the alert to give similar honour to the sahib. Even to a soldier, the air of rigid discipline about the place, was impressive, and Galt felt himself casually wondering what manner of man was this to whom he must report his arrival. "A fine clean-cut sound officer," he remembered had been described. "Perhaps a little regimental, needs the toning influence of our department, you understand, but undoubtedly a fine soldier." "Hum!" said Galt, thinking of the bodies on the square—"regimental."

He stroked his horse's muzzle and waved away the flies that were bothering it. It was a fine sleek Arab that had thrived on Government fodder. With the eye of a lover he saw the slight twitching of the nostrils—it was getting decidedly hot and it had been

a long ride—and he gave precise directions to his syce on its care. While his horse needed attention a'l else must wait. He must take the pony at once to the river for water, walking it all the way and not trotting a step. He must remove the saddle and replace the blanket to ward the sun's rays off the spine. If possible he must find a shady spot on the river bank, though that was unlikely, and then allow the horse to eat half the feed in the nose bag on the saddle. "Achcha, Sahib." The syce knew how much the sahib loved his clean limbed bay, and he knew he would be well scolded if he disobeyed. A big heart and an angry one at times had the sahib.

Galt stepping out to the gate, halted with a short exclamation of annoyance and rubbed his knee, the ride had stiffened his mended bone. "A crock," he exclaimed, with certain decorative and forceful qualifications, at which the sentry nodded sagely, for he too carried on his body the marks of conflict, but in an instant Galt was looking with a kindly eye at the young Arab farash who was advancing to meet him.

"Military Governor, effendi?"

By George, these Arabs were a handsome race. This stalwart boy might well have served as a model for a Greek statue, were it not for his leanness. He made Galt think of wide desert and star-lit skies, and flocks and tents, far away from the corroding life of towns. The youth was dressed in khaki breeches, puttees and shirt, but on his head was the picturesque dress of the Arab, the yashmagh and ugal. As he looked at the scarlet and white kerchief and the black camel hair ring, (the ugal or camel shackle, so called

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because it was about the head the Arab used to carry the shackle when not in use), Galt felt how appropriate was this uniform for the Arabs who had entered the British service. Here was the good old sensible worth of the British Tommies outfit, enlivened with a touch of Eastern colour. The farash regarded him with a grave dignified politeness.

Naam Yass, the Hakim El Askeri, was in, but at breakfast. Could the sahib wait a few minutes? The hakim did not like to be disturbed at his meals, this with becoming gravity of demeanour. Ah, the sahib spoke Arabic, the farash's face shone with genuine pleasure. It was not often that English came who could speak Arabic. Even the hakim, on whom be peace, could speak no Arabic, but Wallah, the sahib had the accent of Haleb. He would go at once and tell the hakim that the sahib was there. How the Arabs loved their own language. Galt smiled.

He followed the farash into the courtyard, the batan mal hosh, there to await the will of the great hakim. The house of the Military Governor was quite pretentious, though a'most classically severe in its decorations. It had probably been the home of a wealthy merchant, a sheikh, or even a Turkish Pasha. The large courtyard was flagged with bricks, and although otherwise open to the sky was sheltered from the fierce glare of the sun by reed matting, through a chink in which Galt could see, as he glanced upward, a stately ridiculous stork, basking unconcernedly in the ruthless light. A gallery ran about the batan mal hosh, on which stood wooden

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pillars supporting the roof. They were rather extravagantly ornamented with carved cornices. These pillars mostly were guiltless of paint, and had been cracked and bent by many summers of blistering heat. The house was very white and very clean, (Galt rather fancied this the result of British occupation), the relieving points of colour being yellow and blue crescents, which ornamented the gallery's balustrade, and the many hued glass of upper windows which cast a vivid patch on the courtyard floor.

Galt's interest centred not in the hakim's house, but in the occupants of the batan mal hosh. Squatting in the grateful shade of the roof's chitai, speaking in muffled tones, were a motley crew, without question the petitioners, prisoners, and so forth of the hakim's morning court. They returned Galt's gaze, some with indifference, some with a quiet searching expression in which he read the same wonder, the same questioning that he had seen in the eyes of the men on the square. Those faces seemed to say to him, "Our cases are going to be adjudicated by a strange law, of which we hear little or nothing. Necessarily that law must be faulty because it is not the Divine Law of Muhammad, though at times it appears just. One thing only is certain, the judgments of this court are final. They must be obeyed. Who are we to fight against fate? Maktub,—it is written." And with but one exception, and he was not an Arab, no man's face betrayed a trace of fear, though several were closely guarded and might receive heavy punishments. "The more I see of these sturdy fellows the more I am reconciled to my task,"

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thought Galt. "Whatever the faults of the Arabs, they are a race of men."

The company were of all ranks of life, that bare-legged ragged fellow was no doubt a coolie, that plump gentleman in robe of silk embroidered in gold, a merchant of the suq. Most of them were Arabs. That hajji who wore the Kafeih to show that he has made the great pilgrimage to the Kaabah was probably an Arab, but his small black-eyed, olive-skinned companion, with a very gaudy turban, was no doubt a Persian, and that hollow-chested fellow, wearing loose, ill-fitting European garb, alone of all the company to show fear, was a son of the captive race of Babylon.

Galt's eyes rested for a moment on the Jew and were withdrawn. Cowardice is not pleasant to look on, but it was not this alone that repelled. It was the heavy, bony, protruding face, with the small shifting eyes, that peered about ferret-like as if for a hole to escape. He sidled up to Galt, and with an ingratiating smirk whined in his ear. Would the sahib, whose face was so kind, say but a word, one word on his behalf, to the hakim, whose heart was of flint? He spoke in English quite fluently, though with a nasal intonation. As God was his judge he was a poor man, a very poor man, whom the Turks had despoiled, (curses upon them), whose father was ailing, and who sought but to make an honest anna for his support, and he did not know as the God of Judæa was his judge, he did not know that it was necessary to have a license to sell fruit to the soldiers. A Military Policeman thrust the man

back not too gently. "Don't bother with him, sir," he said. "Flaming lies every word of it. Seems to me some of these fellows must have drunk it in with their mother's milk, they are so almighty adept at lying. He's an old customer of ours, this one." Galt knew the breed, and turned away.

It was a relief to look at that Arab linked to the arm of a shebana. He saw the flicker of contempt that crossed his cold, iron hard face at the sight of the Jew's discomfiture. He was no doubt guilty of a much more serious crime than the Hebrew, and his punishment would be heavier, but he would not deign to ask for intercession. He was a warrior of the Caliphate of a thousand years ago. Galt could see him dashing across the desert on his steed. "Killed an unbeliever of a Jew, I think, sir, with his khanjar at the Mosque Gate," explained the M.P. who had spoken of the Jew, but there was now a new note in his voice; "a dangerous fellow, sir; probably he will be hanged as he deserves."

"Hum, one of my children," said Galt, and the M.P. looked at him puzzled, and slightly nettled. The officer had not been listening.

Galt's eyes fell on a little group apart from the rest. His curiosity was challenged. An aged man, tall and stooped with the weight of his years, was praying on a mat, his face turned towards Mecca. Now he prostrated himself until his forehead touched the ground, now he stood up with head bowed, hands folded across the breast. Behind him, standing in an alcove, a girl, apparently young, heavily veiled so that her face was quite invisible, held in her arms

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the dead body of a bird. A Muslim at his prayers in public is a sight too commonplace to excite wonder, but why in the name of Allah among the supplicants and prisoners at the hakim's court should a girl appear with a dead stork in her arms, was more than Galt could guess. The bird with its long, spindling legs and thin hanging neck was clearly a brother of that sedate fellow which Galt could see through the chink in the ceiling matting. The blank expressionless mask of her veil of course told nothing, but Galt fancied, though of course it was merely fancy, that the girl held the bird tenderly, almost reverently.

His orisons finished, the old man seated himself on the ground in oriental fashion, and the girl gently placed the inert body in his lap. It was a strange picture. The man slowly bowed his head as if uttering a prayer over the corpse, then raised his face, his eyes on Galt. He never could become accustomed to this affliction of the Arab race. It needed but a glance to show him that the man was not aware of his existence. Sunken eyeballs told their story, the eyes were sightless, and gazed on vast, enveloping night. Lean, ascetic, with facial lines of chiselled bronzed marble, and with a brow on which serene resignation was enthroned, the man seemed the very embodiment of his religion. "Maktub,—Kismet" was writ large on that wise old oriental visage. Pity was ousted by a feeling of silent curiosity tinged with wonder. "The spirit of the East personified," said Galt, "changeless, mysterious, like a fire glowing dull but undying amid its ashes."

A young Arab who had just entered the courtyard

paused for an instant before the blind man. "Allah give you grace of the morning, master," he said, with a touch of respect, his hand on his breast. "Allah," replied the old man. About his head was wound a blue turban, which like the green in some parts, Galt knew to be the mark of a *saiyid*, a teacher, one of those fortunate beings in whose veins runs a strain of the blood of the Prophet.

The *saiyid*'s companion was rolling the mat, a rug of Iran, on which he had been praying. From a slight touch on his shoulder he moved out of an arrow-like shaft of sunlight, and she gently pressed him down on the mat which she now spread for a seat. Her care would have been touching had not Galt seen at once in it the subservience of Eastern women, the servants of the stronger sex. According to the supreme law expounded in the Koran, "Men shall have pre-eminence above women because of those advantages wherein Allah hath caused the one of them to excel the other."

Galt simply felt sorry for the unfortunate girl, who was either wife or daughter. What a life these Muslim women must lead. When they walk abroad they must be veiled. At their own homes they cannot speak with male guests except from behind curtains; they can be chastised by their husbands for "perverseness"; they can be divorced on any trumpery cause if the husbands but say "I divorce thee" three times before witnesses, and must bear the humiliating burden of a life of polygamy. Certainly, thought Galt, it was not a pleasant life that such women as this one were forced to lead.

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He could not somehow associate that ascetic, almost saint-like face with thoughts of brutality, though he well knew that the Arab countenance is often a very effective mask. But the girl's gentle care seemed rather to be born of love. The saiyid's turban, which had been slightly awry, was straightened on his head with deft fingers. She had moved near from behind the man and Galt noticed that her figure was slim, straight and very girlish. She seemed indeed a child just budding into womanhood. She had a proud bearing too, that somehow told of free desert airs and clear skies.

"No doubt Bedawin, these too," said Galt, "bred in the camel hair tents of desert tribes."

He looked with interest at this child of the wilderness. Beneath the plain black aba which reached just below her knees, he saw, (let us not suggest that he looked long upon it), the thin, but very shapely brown calf, frankly devoid of any covering. Her ankles were encircled by rather ornate bands of silver. How deeply ingrained is the love of jewellery in the soul of the Arab girl. How often had he seen them crowding about the goldsmiths and the silversmiths in the suq at Baghdad and other Iraq towns.

Perhaps it was the little touch of vanity displayed in the anklets, for they were more ornate than the usual run, showing Persian workmanship; perhaps it was the round babylike feet, or more possibly of course it was simply the affection shown by the girl for the old saiyid that rather piqued Galt's curiosity. We are quite certain it was the child's affection, but inwardly smiling to himself he

fell to conjuring up a picture of the face that lay hidden behind that black, opaque veil. That cloth might have been a stone wall. She was young, very young. Her feet as well as her slim figure had told him that. What a strange sense of propriety, according to Western standards, had these Eastern women. Their faces were hidden most carefully, and yet they moved about with their limbs from the knees downward entirely unclad. With secret amusement he wondered what a certain young lady whose photo he carried in his kit, would think if she knew that he was making guesses anent a girl's features by an examination of her bared feet and ankles. Her face had of course the fresh curves of youth. Her complexion was bronzed, but not too dark, fairer than the feet because less exposed to the sun. She was quite presentable he decided, but the vision quickly faded. No doubt her face was stained with blue ink and her eyes underscored with some disfiguring colour, her hair dyed with henna, and in all probability alas! she wore a nose ring. Assuredly the lady of the photo had small cause for jealousy.

Attracted by his scrutiny, she was looking at him now. She was standing stock still like a river reed in still water. He felt her eyes on him though not even the shadowy contour of her face was visible. He felt slightly uncomfortable. She was only an Arab, but an intuitive chivalry made him regret that he had subjected her to a prolonged stare. Of what was she thinking? What a ridiculous custom this veil wearing. Why couldn't he see whether she was smiling or frowning? And now he was wonder-

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ing if after all she was not a Bedawi. Perhaps she did possess the straight cut aristocratic face of the Arab. Her anklets were from Iran. He was thinking of the Arabian Nights now. Might she not have the black eyes, the coal black hair, and the small delicate features of the Persian? Perhaps after all it was as well that she wore the veil. His imaginings were agreeable.

He had turned away, but when he looked again she was still gazing at him intently. She had an unfair advantage over him. She could see. She could see that he moved with a limp. He involuntarily straightened himself. Ridiculous! His mind flew back to the one cardinal fact which for an instant he had forgotten, her nose ring. No doubt she wore one. It was a very common form of adornment, like the anklets. What sort of a ring was it? He had seen little Arab girls with dainty little jewelled rings, that instead of disfiguring rather graced their pretty little cheeks. He hoped she wore such a one. But he had also seen monstrosities that defied description, and judging from that ornate pair of anklets, hers most likely was an amazing creation. He smiled at the thought, but in an instant he was smitten with regret. She had seen, and had stepped swiftly back into the alcove behind the ancient *saiyid*. How boorish he had been. What had she seen in that smile?

"What is it, My Eyes?" he heard the *saiyid* ask. The sharp ears of the blind had detected the sudden movement.

"The sun is hot, I moved into the shadow."

Arabian daughter of Mother Eve! Galt had always considered the Arabic tongue guttural, at times he had decided that it had a sonorous ring, admirably adapted to the chanting of the Koran, but he had never thought that it could actually be musical.

The farash was again at his side. He had been away some little time, and now there was hesitation and apology in his eyes. Apparently the Military Governor had decided that he did not wish to be disturbed at breakfast. Galt's time had been greatly diverted, but it was rather hot where he was standing, and he could not very well squat like these Easterners in the shade.

"Tell the hakim," he said sharply in Arabic to the boy, "that I am the hakim el siyasi."

The words caused a stir among the Arabs. They were all attention and were gazing at him curiously, whispering to each other. The saiyyid half raised himself from the ground.

"The hakim el siyasi," he said sonorously to the girl, "Alhamdulillah! Dost thou hear Uyuni? The Arabs have now a friend in El Ragi."

The words of the saiyyid and the attitude of all the Arabs struck a chord in Galt's heart. A spontaneous tribute had been paid to the political officers of Iraq. Their work had spoken for them throughout the land. The friends of the Arab! It was so they were heralded, even in this town where no Hakim el siyasi had yet come. Galt felt a distinct thrill of pride that he was one of them, and he must be true to his trust. And now he found himself for an instant wondering what effect the revelation of his

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position had had on the lady of the monstrous nose-ring, the heavily veiled one. As the farash returned and very respectfully bade him follow to the hakim's dining room, he cast a single backward glance at the figure in the alcove. Galt blinked; at the top of the flagged steps leading to the hakim's underground dining sanctum, he said "Hem," a little lower he whistled, and a few steps more he ejaculated "My Christian Aunt!" It had been just for the fraction of a second, that the veil had been drawn aside so that she might see him more clearly, but in that instant he had caught a glimpse of a face oval and very fair from which violet eyes peered at him, of a strand of hair the colour of millet sheaves, and wonder of wonders! not a sign of a nose ring.

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III

THE MILITARY GOVERNOR

Now that he had learned that the sahib was a political officer the farash was even more deferential than before. As he preceded Galt down the winding staircase, he stopped once as if to speak, near the bottom he turned.

"Sahib," he said in a low voice, "the hakim el askeri is a great sahib. He is like the sun, so far above us." Galt was a soldier and instinctively resented any criticism, good or bad, of his brother officers, but the rebuke was withheld. The farash was naively, intensely in earnest. He liked the boy. "Effendi, for a time I lived in a town on the Euphrates. The hakim el siyasi there was the father of the Arabs. Thy face, sahib, is kind. Are all political officers such as he?"

"We are appointed by our Government to help the Arabs," said Galt.

"Praise be to Allah the all wise, the all seeing," returned the boy, his handsome face alight, "the British hakuma is great—beyond understanding." He shook his head puzzled; then as though to himself, "and yet are they unbelievers—worshippers of the Isa, the son of Mary."

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"Better than the rule of the Turk?" asked Galt with a smile. The boy's face hardened.

"Wallah, yes," he said.

It was a large, high, dark though whitewashed room which Galt now entered, dimly lighted by a small window, which just above the level of the ground was set high beneath the lofty ceiling. It was a great underground vault, similar to those which he knew existed far and wide under the ruins of ancient El Ragi which lay beyond the town walls. These had been used by the inhabitants to escape the rigours of the summer. More than once that morning his horse had just escaped putting his hoof into an airshaft of the old subterranean city. The cool air was a delightful relief. Rugs from Ispahan, in which Galt afterwards found that the Military Governor had a discriminating taste, ornamented the walls, a kithmutgar in spotless white, attentive, silent waited on the breakfasting officer.

A jaw of lean lines, an eye cast to lead men in the swaying hour, a body which, even in repose, showed restrained energy, Major Falconer was a clean cut soldier from his shining field boots which were just visible beneath the table, to his close cropped head. Galt saw this at one swift appraising glance, but he also saw that the Military Governor was not in a pleasant mood. Apparently he was annoyed at being disturbed. This was just a little bit thick. After all the Military Governor and Political Officer, whose lots are cast among an alien people, should work hand in hand. They should help each other. Yet his "Good morning, sir," was answered curtly.

Galt sat in the chair placed for him by the Indian servant, and slightly puzzled, regarded the other with a half smile. The Major was intent on his breakfast. He was now eating a numi hulu. There was an interval of silence. The Military Governor looked up frowning. Apparently he expected the visitor to say something, but Galt was silently surveying a rug on the wall. It was a distinctly good specimen.

"I asked for a company of infantry," said the Governor shortly. "A company of infantry—and they send me a Political Officer." Just the trace of a flush mounted to Galt's brow at the snapping contemptuous "Political Officer," but he said blandly enough, "I say, sir, have you ever tried riding in the early morning."

The Military Governor transfixed Galt with an amazed glare. He did not seem to be able to see properly, this fellow who dared to address him so flippantly and so incomprehensibly,—so foolishly. He raised a monocle and adjusted it to his eye with great deliberation. He seldom adopted this expedient of awcing anyone, but it never failed in its purpose, and yet this fellow seemed actually to be smiling,—yes certainly there was the suggestion of mirth about the corners of his mouth.

"Not doctor's specifics, sir,—no use, none in the least," continued the bland voice. "Exercise is the thing, in the cool of the morning or the evening. That's what's needed."

"Needed for what?" the words were cold as steel.

"For your liver, sir," came the quiet response.

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The Major's complexion was distinctly ruddy with just a suggestion of green. The monocle dropped from his eye but was instantly recovered. If the glare before was cold, it was now like the opening of a blast furnace, but Galt was becoming grave as one should be who has offered sage counsel and trusts it will be followed. Minutes, one, two, three of dead silence. The Governor was looking closely at his visitor, and gradually his anger unconsciously subsided. He saw a rather commonplace face, at least so it appeared at first, with a wide mouth and strong white teeth. There was good humour in that face, but also, and this was more and more clearly impressed on the Governor's mind, there was a rugged simple strength. The level eyes never faltered, there was that disconcerting gleam about them as of mirth scarce suppressed. The fellow, a total stranger, had taken liberties, extraordinary liberties, but there was something about that good humoured, wholesome, manly face, that despite himself cooled his righteous indignation. The man was crippled. He was quite noticeably lame. He had perceived that as he entered the room. The Major saw behind the man, the soldier, one who has been handled none too gently by the storms of war, but one nevertheless who had come through with his strong, good natured spirit unbroken. He began to feel uncomfortable. Galt saw the lines of his face soften and the thin lips part in the shadow of a smile. The monocle was removed slowly and the Governor was thoughtfully wiping it.

"Sorry, Captain, er—what is the name? Ah, Galt. A little abrupt no doubt,—ahem! Have you

had breakfast? Well, a drink then, soda, lime juice? Rather early for a chota." It was thus he sought to make amends, and Galt's good humour never far away, came immediately to the surface. He accepted a drink of soda which was very refreshing. It was delightfully cool. The Governor drank one too and seemed to enjoy it. His anger had now vanished.

"Cools one down considerably. Quite as effective as the exercise I prescribed," said Galt innocently.

"Yes, thank Heaven we can at least get ice in this infernal hole. From a boat on the river you know." Then he caught Galt's eye and smiled. The spirit of antagonism, which might have been a formidable barrier between these two who were destined to work together, had gone, never as Galt instinctively felt, to return, and Galt was pleased.

"Would handicap my work abominably," he said to himself "the only officer here, and with our work dovetailing as it must, and I fancy," and he looked shrewdly at the other's clean cut, direct and soldierly stern features, "I can possibly be of assistance to him."

"You think it is liver that's troubling me," said Major Falconer. "Oh, that's all right. If it is, it's a liver complaint which I'm afraid could not be cured by the early morning rides you prescribe. By the way you know I do take them. Farash!" and when the boy appeared, "send Corporal Owens here at once." He rose and paced the floor. "Corporal Owens, bring me the last letter from Headquarters regarding the appointment of a Political Officer for

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El Ragi." Falconer's face had again become a cold, hard mask. He seemed to have forgotten Galt.

"Now listen to this," he said indignantly, as he ran his eye down the lines of the letter, the monocle glaring. "'Your dealings with the Arabs show a lamentable lack of appreciation of their character!' I don't understand the Arab, confound them! I know them as a precious pack of cut-throats and sneak thieves. I know them quite as well as I need or want to know them." Galt felt some sympathy for the Governor. A severe wiggling from H.Q. is never pleasant, and yet if there had been a shadow of doubt in his mind before, he was convinced at that moment that there was great need of a Political Officer in El Ragi. Falconer passed over a few lines mumbling, then broke out again, "Your request for an armed force must be refused. Not only do we need our forces elsewhere, the Army of occupation is small enough, but we are certain that your request is unnecessary." "Unnecessary! How do they know?" the Major snapped. "Unnecessary! sitting over there in their chairs, and pestering us with their correspondence. I don't suppose this Staff Captain has ever been inside the gate of this town." He threw the letter aside on the table. "The man at the spot should know. I suppose you know," he ended irrelevantly, "why those H.Q. Johnnies wear spurs? To keep their feet from rolling off the desks."

"I can quite understand your chagrin," commented Galt. "You ask for a company of infantry, over two hundred men, and what do you get? One man, and a cripple at that."

The Governor's ire subsided before the quiet rallery.

"Don't misunderstand me, Galt; nothing against you or your job. It's these Staff Johnnies. The Political Officers I understand have done very good, quite excellent work." It was spoken rather grudgingly and Galt smiled. "In their place they're all right, but I tell you, Galt, there is too much wishy washy foolishness, too infernally much what they are pleased to call 'diplomacy' in our dealings with these niggers."

"We are not, and never have been, at war with the Arabs," returned Galt, a little tersely. He did not like the word "nigger." It was distinctly inappropriate.

"No," snapped the other, "but would you be diplomatic to a jackal? No, it's the rifle, the rifle, and the knout that's needed, more of the steel glove, and less of the political salve. By heavens, if you had seen as I have, your friends being tortured—yes, before my very eyes. I was next on the list, rescued just in time. Diplomacy, political cant! Pshaw!"

The smile vanished from Galt's lips. An unpleasant recollection had been aroused.

"I shot an Arab with my own hand," he said quietly. "He was maiming one of my men, a little Gurkha." The Military Governor could see that he was deeply moved. He was puzzled.

"Then, for the life of me," he said, "I can't see why you wear those," and he pointed to the white and gold lapels.

"Why not?" Galt asked, surprised at the other's

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limited view. "It was damnable, but an isolated case, just as yours. Not typical. O yes, there have been many cases; yes, I'll admit that, but think of their ignorance, their lives of violence, the lies of the Turks about us, their religion. It is our bounden duty to help the Arabs. That's what I am here for." Stirred by his own words, Galt described the scope of the work of the political officer with great earnestness. He spoke at considerable length, and felt rather gratified that the Military Governor was clearly impressed. The enthusiasm of such whole-hearted devotion to a cause is infectious.

"Of course, sir," said Galt, with a short laugh, "I don't want you to think that I believe you do not need the company of infantry. I don't know a thing about conditions here. Are the Arabs threatening to revolt?"

"Well, no, not exactly," returned Falconer, a little nonplussed at the direct question, and annoyed at himself in consequence. "Not as far as that, though I am not at all certain that it won't come to that. There's unrest, discontent, and it's growing. And I'll have to admit frankly, I can't get to the root of the trouble. They're infernally wily, these fellows,—subterranean. There's someone or a group stirring up disaffection. I'm certain of it, but . . ."

Something prompted Galt to ask "What sort of a chap is the sheikh?" Falconer frowned slightly at the question. "Oh, an Arab from his red curled-up shoes to his camel hair rings, but for all that he's the only man I can trust in El Ragi. I always have an inclination to keep my hand on my watch when I

am talking to these Arabs, but the Scorpion is our friend." Galt was thinking of the town square, the fluttering rags, and the frown that had been whipped away like the closing of a shutter.

"The cause is quite simple," Falconer patted his pocket significantly, "Boodle Baksheesh. He makes more out of us than he did out of the Turk. 'There is no God but Allah,—and Mammon.' That is the Arab's creed." The Military Governor went on to tell of the slaying of a Sabeian silversmith, "pagan, you know, with a dash of Christianity. But a good citizen." The looting of Jewish and Chaldaean shops in the suq. "And now," with indignation, "the beggars have taken to stealing our rifles. The Gurkhas haven't suffered. They are a little too smart even for the oily Arab sneak thief, but the poor old blunt Tommy is fair game. The battalion, you know, across the river. You saw the gallows in the square as you came? Stealing rifles. I'd leave the scoundrels up for a week if it weren't for the weather. I hope it will prove a salutary example, but who can tell? They seemed actually to be amused when I told them they were going to be executed, and as for telling who were the instigators of the outrage,—I am sure they were working under somebody's orders,—not a cheep out of them. It's a beastly shame, you know. That company of infantry would have effectively stamped out the whole thing. Nothing like a small demonstration, you know. And yet," he added with a generosity that surprised Galt, and rather warmed his heart, "I am not at all certain now that H.Q. have been so very far wrong."

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"Have you no idea at all," Galt asked, "who might be stirring up the trouble?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply. "I have." Falconer glanced at his watch. "Hem, it's already past the time. I'm holding court. Would you like to come up? I find it dull myself, but probably as a Political Officer you might find the cases interesting. Besides, I'd rather like you to have a look at them. It may be by our combined efforts we may discover something. You know religion is behind almost every trouble with these Arabs. Only the unbelievers suffer. This fellow has a good deal of influence with the people. It's only a shot in the dark I'll admit, but I suspect him. Religious frenzy, you know, in this country is a strong force. The fellow may have thought of Jihad, a holy war. He's an old blind Koran reader.

IV

THE GOVERNOR'S COURT

THEY passed through the courtyard, the Major stalking in front, glancing neither to left nor right, dignity clothing him like a mantle, every inch the Military Governor. The monocle, carefully adjusted, preceded him, casting forth its austere beam. To the Arabs it was an emblem of authority, and they looked upon it with awe. The guards came to the "Present" with mechanical precision; then remained rigid, and the Arabs rose quickly to their feet. Only the man with the stork, unconscious in his blindness or wrapt in meditation, remained sitting for a moment. A British M.P. moved forward to stir him into life, but the girl with an agility that was almost menacing, glided between and helped the aged man to his feet.

Galt's eyes were drawn irresistibly, in puzzled enquiry, to the strange couple. They were an enigma, a riddle to which the key was withheld. Where but in the home of the Arabian Nights could one have encountered two people like these? A dead stork forsooth! Galt thought of the One-eyed Calender, and the girl behind the veil; the one glimpse of her had set winging the most absurd, whimsical

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fancies. But there was an unpleasant trend to his thoughts now. He looked keenly at the sightless old saiyid. He somehow did not like to think of him as a fomentor of revolt. He hoped the Governor was wrong. That face might have belonged to a Christian hermit of the Middle Ages. Asceticism, infinite patience, religious zeal, all these were faithfully mirrored. The face of the average Arab may on occasions be an impenetrable mask, but no! Galt felt sure that the Governor had made a mistake; but what in the world was the fellow doing with the stork?

That veil was exactly as expressive as a mutti wall, but mysterious, fascinating. "Not the sign of a nose ring," said Galt to himself, and wondered if he would ever catch another glimpse of the charming portrait which lay behind. He stopped dead in his tracks, and his heart gave a distinct bump of pleasure. She was coquetting with him. A small hand flashed the veil aside, and now more clearly than before he saw the fresh young face, palpitating with vital animal life which the langour of the east had not yet begun to stifle. The skin had a slight ruddy tint, no darker than a healthy seashore tan on the fairest of complexions. Violet glowing eyes met his, but there was no coquetry in them. A swift appealing message was flashed to him, like a flicker of light, and again they were sundered as far as the poles by the veil.

"That wireless message," said Galt, as he passed on, puzzled, mystified, "as plainly as if it had been written or spoken, asked my aid. My aid for what?" The saiyid was holding that absurd bird as tenderly as if it were the body of a child. "I wonder what

the devil the game is. It's either an Arabian Nights' yarn, or, what is more likely, a madman's freak."

They entered from the gallery the whitewashed court room. Everything about the house was scrupulously clean. The Military Governor saw to that. A single praying carpet from Iran decorated the floor, and the walls were covered with maps of the various theatres of the great war. The Major in his isolation among the Arabs had evidently followed the fortunes of his country's arms with keen concentration. A Persian chatti of water in a corner and a swaying punkah agitated by hidden hands from the next department, were the room's concessions to the torrid clime. Near the far end of the room was a table covered with books and papers, and about the walls were gahwa benches. On one of these Galt sat.

A coloured glass window cast a yellow, blue and red shimmer on the more sober colours of the Iran praying rug. This window, and something about the size, shape and location of the room, made Galt aware of its former nature, when the house belonged to a Turkish pasha or Arab sheikh. At one time he was quite certain that rich tapestries had hung from the wall; rugs of the finest texture, centuries old, had covered the floor; heavy curtains had fallen from the arched doorway. Slippered veiled forms used to glide noiselessly through the shadows. In Islam, Galt, from a slight superficial study, had found much to admire. The virile desert prophet had stripped Christianity of some of the fungus that had attached to it in the dark centuries after Christ. The simple, direct, strong creed of Islam had helped the Arab to

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a great extent from his ignorance. But what of the Arab woman? She was helped slightly it is true,—nothing could have been worse than her status in the time of ignorance, but she was still left shackled with the hateful bonds of polygamy, and the system had been given definite legality. It remained in its sinister form the salient tragedy of the East. Galt felt a sort of pity stirring him as his thoughts dwelt on the women of this harim, and now they rested on the girl below. Galt could not help frowning. That fair young creature instinct with the freedom which her soul had drunk from the desert air and crystal stars, some day,—the time was not yet, he was certain,—would be engulfed in the abyss of slavery. The glow of those wonderful violet eyes would be smothered in the stuffy, erotic atmosphere of a harim.

The judge had taken his seat, a babu had set a docket before him and had begun to explain something about the first case. A Syrian terjaman, olive skinned, with long, curling, oily, black hair, stood attentively at the left of the table, ready to interpret for the hakim. And the court opened.

Galt settled back on the bench. He was simply a spectator, but none the less an eager, watchful one, prepared to enjoy and profit by the proceedings. He was now to see his children at close intimate range, to hear them air their grievances against each other, and against the government. They would be judged here on their crimes and their delinquencies. The cases would be Eastern, the law Western. It would need a man with the mind of a jurist and a politician to reconcile the two. Galt looked at the Governor with

misgivings. The monocle was gleaming coldly. He looked as out of place, Galt thought whimsically, as a dress suit in the Sahara.

The Arab, shackled to the shebana, was now before the hakim's desk, receiving unflinchingly the full force of the current from the battery of that monocle. There was no denial. Indeed it would appear there would have been little virtue in denial. The victim, a Jew, had been brazenly knifed in view of hundreds at mid-day. The stalwart fellow listened imperturbably to the recital of his crime.

"He desecrated our Mosque, Sahib," he stated calmly, one might have said with hauteur. "He entered the gate. It was forbidden by the law of the Prophet, and I killed him." That was all. There was the bold "take it or leave it" statement. There was no plea for mercy, despite the violent nature of the crime. Something in the calm defiant courage of the Arab challenged Galt's respect. He had spoken the truth, he had simply followed well established custom, founded on sacred law. Had he not killed the desecrator of the mosque some other Mussulman would. It was true, as Galt knew, that if he had crossed the threshold of a synagogue the Jews would have made short shift of him. "East is East." It was an Eastern custom. How would the Governor deal with the case? It was certainly not an easy one to decide, and Galt, despite himself, rather hoped the penalty would not be too severe.

The Governor was gazing at the prisoner. The terjaman had just translated his words.

"Impudence, sheer colossal impudence," and he

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brought down his clenched hand forcefully on the desk. "You commit cold-blooded murder, and you stand there as if it were something to be proud of. By Gad! Hanging is too good for you." The Arab smiled haughtily when the terjaman had translated as well as he could the somewhat idiomatic English. But when judgment was passed, the extreme penalty was not given. Galt felt relieved, though a little surprised. The explanation was forthcoming as soon as the man had left the court.

"Our government is too lenient, Galt. It encourages these outrages. I am not allowed to give the death penalty for a crime like that. If I had my way he'd have taken his place in the square dangling between the earth and Heaven. How can I keep these people in hand?"

He was exasperated.

"I can't help thinking it wise under the circumstances to be lenient," Galt suggested. "Their beliefs, you know."

"Confound their beliefs. Think of us killing anyone, even a Fiji Islander, for entering a Christian Church."

"But this is the East," said Galt. The Governor frowned.

Galt's suspicions were being strengthened. The Governor was an honest, straightforward soldier, for all his glacial airs, probably a thoroughly efficient soldier. He rather liked him already, but as a judge of the Arabs, he was altogether too much of the European. Galt rather suspected that the town's unrest might be partly due to this.

There were evidences of this disquiet in other cases that were soon brought up. A Sabeian silversmith had been robbed by a Persian Shiah Muslim and a Chaldæan merchant by a Marsh Arab.

"You see," said Falconer, when the cases had been disposed of, "it is the Christians who were robbed. Religion's behind it." Galt thought of the saiyid.

"A Sabeian can scarcely be called a Christian," he returned. "He calls himself a John the Baptist Christian, and Christ is one of his prophets, but he also worships the stars. He is mostly a pagan. He is full of superstitions. He believes the colour of the sky, for instance, is the reflection of a torquoise pillar that stands on one side of the earth."

"In any event he is not a Muslim. He's a good citizen and strongly pro British. I wish we had more of them in El Ragi." Galt nodded. That was true. The Sabeians were fine citizens. But Falconer's suspicions of the saiyid were unfounded. Of that he was sure.

"Yes, Galt, I am quite certain that religion is at the root of our trouble here. Keep an eye, as I told you, on that old saiyid. Ah, here comes an old friend."

The Jew who had interceded for help from Galt in the batan mal hosh was now in the room cringing and fawning. He was contemptuously thrust forward by the M.P.

"Selling drinks and food to soldiers without a license, sir," said the M.P. crisply. "In the Hillshire Battalion, sir."

Galt well knew that the Jew's transgression was not

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as slight as it appeared on its face. Cholera, typhoid, dysentery, countless cases of these, and many deaths had been traced to filthy food. It was to keep the sale of food and drink in the hands of responsible vendors that the Government had adopted the license system, and it was this stringent law that the Jew had infringed.

The prisoner's face was repellent. Though heavy-boned it was like a ferret's, white, pinched, keen, burrowing. As a race Galt admired the descendants of the captives of Babylon. Shrewd, tenacious, virile, they usually had the other merchants of the town bazaars at their mercy. But this piece of flotsam had nothing of the spirit of Ancient Judah in his worthless carcase.

"Thousand rupees fine," said the judge sternly.

"Sahib," almost wailed the Jew in English, "my shop always ver' ver' clean, sahib, and ver' low price, jus' baksheesh enough for leev on, sahib. Not one anna over the price you put up on list in bazaar. I swear to that, sahib. I put no ghi in my cake, sahib, jus' good butter, always good butter. Have mercy, sahib, on poor man. I have no license, sahib, because I no can pay one hundred rupees. All my money go for fadder and mudder, ver' much ill, sahib. My fadder blind, my mudder paralyze, can't walk—not one step, sahib. De doctor he cost so ver' much, sahib."

It was a pathetic appeal, but the Governor nodded meaningly to Galt.

"Friend Yusuf," he said, "do you think it so long since you were last before me that I forget you?"

When you were selling bogus tablets and seals of Babylon that were made for you in the bazaar. Then you told an equally sad tale. You had just buried your father who had died of cholera. Your mother was dead. How she died I don't remember. How did you acquire the new parents?"

"Sahib," pleaded the Jew, entirely unabashed over the discovery of his falsehoods, but deciding to take a new tack, "I was saraf in the suq when the Turks were here. I am good, so good friend to the British. I had little money then. They took it all from me and gave me worthless paper money. I am penniless, sahib."

"Humph!" said the Governor. He turned to Galt, contemptuously ignoring the prisoner. "You see, Galt, any yarn will do for some of these reptiles. They just jump from one to the other and let you take your choice. His story is a favourite one. It has the element of truth—in some cases, the money changers of El Ragi were defrauded by the Turks. The Turks needed silver and gold; the Jews had it, but unfortunately the Turks had only newly stamped paper currency of more than questionable value to give in exchange. They had, however, very pointed arguments to advance in support of the exchange. Some of the Jews actually threw their money into the Tigris rather than give it to the Turk. It was quite sportsmanlike of them, I think, don't you? Yusuf did the same." Galt was rather surprised. To attribute anything so sportsmanlike as this sacrifice to this Jew seemed incongruous.

"Yes, sahib," Yusuf's ferret face beamed. That

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the story differed from his last plea was obviously a matter of no moment.

"Yes, Yusuf," said the Governor. "I was told by a Jewish saraf, whose money, and there was much of it, is now scattered about the bottom of the Tigris. I don't blame you, Yusuf. I think you showed foresight." The Jew's expression changed, he looked uncomfortable. "It was quite a sensible scheme. I wonder the others didn't do it. He took the precaution, Galt, to tie a string to the bag in which he cast away his money." Galt laughed. "It was a stout string, and when the Turks left it had fulfilled its purpose. The other Jews were rather displeased when they found out that he had stolen a march on them. As a matter of fact this fellow is one of the wealthiest men of El Magi. He is a sort of pariah, a dog that will do anything to make a dishonest anna, but his pockets are lined with gold lira." The Jew hastened a disclaimer. He was a poor man, let God be his witness.

For the first time during the morning the Governor seemed to be finding entertainment.

"All right, Yusuf," he said with an ironic smile, "you needn't pay the thousand rupees, if you are willing to take the alternative punishment, fifty stripes. I'll give you one minute to decide."

The unhappy fellow's face was chalky; he shook like a palm leaf.

"No, no, sahib," he stammered. "I will pay, I will borrow, I will pay the money."

"I thought so," said the contemptuous voice. "Take him out."

The momentary interest past, the Governor sat back in his chair and wiped the sweat from his brow.

"Stir up that punkah wallah," he ordered. "It's stifling in here. This is an unusually long session this morning. Thank heaven many of the civil cases, divorce and all that are tried by the ra'i belediyah, the Kadi and the Sheikh. I don't know what I'd do if I had all their disputes to settle, and now many of these cases will come under your province. It's rather caddish to gloat over your misfortune, but I am human enough to be unreservedly glad. I wish I were in camp on the Indian frontier or anywhere away from this stuffy town. I'm sorry the war is over, this whole business is so infernally boring."

"I don't find it boring," said Galt quietly but very earnestly.

V

THE STORK

GALT's eye was on the door. The last case had been called. The riddle which had intrigued him was about to be solved. Guided by the gentle touch of the carmined fingers, the blind saiyid, bearing in his arms the limp body of the stork, advanced with solemn dignity towards the hakim's desk.

"Allah, the All Powerful, the All Compassionate, the All Wise give you peace effendi." The deep sonorous words were a benediction. The Syrian translated for the hakim whose monocle was a mask of bewilderment. He was staring at the absurd bird, and seemed on the point of expressing his annoyance that a petitioner should put this slight on the dignity of the court, but there was something in the saiyid's ascetic, serene face, on which rested the peace of a life of meditation, that forced him to pause. The hakim's eyes narrowed a little.

"Same to you, I'm sure," he said tartly in English. "But what's it all about?" He had clearly no notion of the nature of the case.

"A great wrong has been done, sahib," pursued the old man, erect, holding the stork in his out-

stretched arms and turning his sightless eyes on the hakim, "A great wrong in the sight of Allah, the All Compassionate. This bird has been slain by an impious hand."

The monocle blazed, though unfortunately without effect, on the saiyyid. He had heard many absurd cases, but this was a little too much. The impertinence of the plea! Did he imagine the Military Governor would waste his time over cases about dead birds? It had been a fairly strenuous as well as a decidedly warm morning; it was about time for a cold soda. He would close the court at once. He could have laughed at himself. He had actually suspected this saiyyid of being a dangerous propagandist, whereas in reality he was simply a lunatic. Galt must be amused, but the Political Officer was watching the saiyyid quite gravely.

Again the voice, sonorous and pleasant but touched with the monotony of the blind, filled the room.

"This dead bird made it's nest upon my roof, gracing my poor home by its presence,—not far, O hakim, from the decaying palace of Harun the usurper. Many moons have waxed and waned since it came to us. Before it nested there, effendi, I had suffered many calamities, but grace came on its wings; it guarded my family. My flocks multiplied. My nahars are full of cool water for my fields. Millet and pasture grass have grown deep. These blessings came to us because this laqlaq nested on my roof on the very day of the year that the sacred spirit of good Husain, so foully murdered, was carried by the Angels to the garden of paradise."

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As the name Husain passed his lips, the saiyid released one hand and slapped his breast. The action moved aside slightly the bosom of his aba laying bare his breast. Galt leaned forward. The brown breast was terribly scarred as though it had been hacked and slashed with innumerable knife wounds.

"Who do you think this Husain is that he says was murdered?" asked the Governor of Galt. He was decidedly bored. "Some relative or friend of the lunatic's."

"No, not exactly," said Galt, "I'm sure you've heard of Husain. He was a Shiah prophet, grandson of Muhammad. He was murdered about twelve hundred years or so ago at Kerbela. See those scars on the old chap's breast? On the 10th of Muharram every year, the anniversary of his death, they have tremendous parades all over the Shiah Muslim world. The mourners slash themselves with knives,—a cheerful custom. This old fellow must have taken part in a lot of these celebrations by appearances."

"You would think," said Falconer dryly, "that almost enough time had passed to ease their sorrow."

"Killed by an impious hand." The sonorous voice was strident now. "The hand of an English soldier." There was something almost majestic in the man's declamation. He was certainly in earnest. "Bismillah, I want justice hakim mal Anglez."

The hakim pondered and frowned; then waved his hand impatiently.

"I'm a fool to do it, give the fellow a hundred rupees for his dead bird. Galt, let us go down and have a cool soda."

But the saiyid on hearing the verdict from the terjaman stood erect.

"Money!" the voice vibrated. "A hundred rupees, a thousand—ten thousand rupees! Can you cure all wrongs with gold? Is this English justice?"

The Governor was thunderstruck. He adjusted his monocle.

"What do you think of that, Galt? Refuses a hundred rupees. Why I didn't even have the fellow's word verified. He may be lying." It had not occurred to him till this moment that he had accepted the saiyid's word as absolute truth. "Refuses a hundred rupees. The bird dead or alive isn't worth one. What does he expect me to do, execute the soldier whoever he is for killing his wretched fowl? Orderly, take the fellow out. Come along, Galt."

But Galt did not rise. He felt slightly ill at ease. He thought that the Major was making a mistake in dealing with the man's petition so summarily. He was not a madman. He was perhaps verging on his dotage but he was a teacher and a man of influence among the Arabs. It was in just such ways as this that disaffection was fostered. Galt could not guess what sort of redress the saiyid wished or would be adequate for such an unusual case. He probably would have given the same verdict as the Governor. Money is an effective balm for the average Arab's wounds. But the old saiyid was different. From behind that opaque veil questioning violet eyes were bent on him. He felt that something was expected of him, she was now asking for his aid, but he was puzzled.

"Just a minute, Major, if you don't mind," he said. "You know," a little awkwardly, "we must respect their religion."

"Religion? Certainly." The hakim el askeri was irritated. "Have you forgotten already the leniency to the murderer? Their mosques are inviolate. No one is allowed to interfere with their religious observances. But this fowl—what has that to do with religion? A lunatic's superstition."

"Superstition perhaps in our eyes," Galt was beginning to see light a little. "As ridiculous as walking under a ladder, or thirteen dining together, but to this Arab, to all Arabs, the stork is a semi-sacred bird; this stork was particularly sacred because, as he says, it built its nest on his hut, on the anniversary of his Imam's death." He rose and stepping close to the hakim's side spoke so low that not even the keen ear of the babu or Syrian terjaman could hear, "Considering the state of mind of the people, don't you think it would be as well to propitiate the old fellow somehow? He is a saiyyid and a religious leader of his people."

"Tut! Propitiate a doting old imbecile? Well, Political Officer, suggest a verdict." Galt was silent but he was thinking.

The veiled girl whispered in the saiyyid's ear, and again came the voice deep and sonorous.

"I appeal for judgment to the friend of the Arab, the hakim el siyasi."

Galt involuntarily straightened. The Governor frowned but paused and looked at Galt with sardonic amusement.

"Rather a good idea that,—not at all bad. Sit down here, Galt, I've no doubt you're a better hand at dealing with madmen than I. Your decision will be final. It will go down on the records. Only don't condemn the wretched culprit of a soldier to death. Drop down later and have a soda." The Major adjusted his monocle and strode gravely to the door, the guard coming to a ramrod salute.

Galt took the Military Governor's chair. He was still in somewhat of a quandary. The Military Governor was having the laugh on him, but he somehow felt that the appeal of the ancient saiyid had put him as a political officer on trial.

"Have you the soldier here who shot the bird?" he asked the babu.

"He iss below, sir-r," was the reply in the clipped accents of the Hindu.

"Bring him up," Galt told the orderly. The soldier appeared.

The babu tittered showing his white teeth, and the guard mindful of appropriate court decorum subdued his smile.

"How is it you come to court in this condition, my man?" Galt asked. "Celebrating last night?" The soldier's face was ludicrously scratched and bruised.

The man flushed under his tan and discolorations. He pointed indignantly at the veiled girl, and Galt fancied that answering lightning flashed from the hidden regions behind the veil. She seemed like a little wild animal about to spring.

"No, sir, I wasn't drunk, sir." The man's voice

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was husky with anger and embarrassment. "I'm ashamed to admit it was her." Galt's face hardened. A new and more serious aspect had been given to the case. The stork was forgotten. Had the girl suffered injury at this fellow's hands? If so. . . . But almost instantly his anger passed. The saiyid had made no such complaint, and the man's face had not a sign of brutality despite its disfigurations. Galt was amused. The soldier was strong and wiry of frame. Could those small carmined nails have ploughed such deep gashes? The little wild cat.

"I was out with me rifle, sir, huntin' sand grouse, you understand, sir, meanin' and intendin' no harm to nobody. I thought mebbe I might even get a shot at a buck. There's gazelle, you know, sir, other side the canal. Me and a pal went out at dawn, sir, but not a sign of anything did we get all day, sir, not a sign, not even a bee eater or a kite, or a bustard, and I was anxious to try me hand at somethin', sir, mainly because I had been telling me pal of prizes I had won for sharp shootin' at home in England, and he'd been calling me a liar. While we was returnin' through the roons me mate and me passed by a flock of sheep that this girl was looking after. She'd pulled down her veil when she'd seen us comin' along, but I'd know her anywhere by them claws of hers. Mighty sharp nails she has, sir, I know to me sorrer. We didn't molest her in no way, sir.

"When we was passing her and her sheep me mate calls out sarcastic, just enough to rile a feller, 'There's a shot fer you, Bill. Now let me see what

you can do.' Me pal was jealous, thinkin' he's something of a hand with a rifle hisself. He was pointing at a stork quite a way off, standin' straight up on an old rooined wall. It was a good distance off and me pal bet me a chip I couldn't hit it. I wasn't sure of myself, as the bird was all neck an' legs, but I up with me rifle and let bang at once, sir. Me pal told me after that I'd hit the bird, and there's no doubt I did. I'm not denying it because he paid me the rupee, saying the show was certainly worth it, though not meanin' tne shooting, sir, and because there's the dead stork there, sir. But I hadn't time to see myself for something jumped on me back that sudden and down I went with me mouth in the dirt, with that cat on me back, scratchin' and pummellin' and breathing hell an' brimstone on me.

"I'm fair ashamed of myself, sir, not that I'd want to hurt her much, sir, seein' that she's a female, sir, but me missus would die with shame if she knew how that woman handled me, and her tryin' for so long herself."

The soldier's head hung in genuine shame and distress then suddenly he looked up angrily.

"And what I can't forgive, sir. I don't call it comrade like, I don't. All the time that she cat there was a-ploughing up me neck and me face with her nails, there was me pal, sir, or him that calls himself a pal, sittin' on a mound, offerin' no help and laughin'! An' you should hear what he's been saying to the boys. It was not a pleasant sityation, sir, a most unpleasant sityation in my way of thinkin'."

He paused a moment, then concluded earnestly.

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"I can't for the life of me figure out, sir, askin' your pardon, what's all this fuss about? What's the crime in killin' a stork, sir?"

Galt kept back a smile, and he solemnly pronounced the judgment that he had decided on during the soldier's recital.

"I'll tell you, my man. The bird you killed was a sacred bird. No doubt you didn't know that. I do not doubt your story. In the future when you want to show your prowess choose another sort of target. To this old man, and the girl who treated you so cavalierly, you have committed sacrilege. That sacrilege must be atoned for. To-morrow at 12 o'clock (Arabic time), six in the morning our time, you will carry the body of this bird beyond the city gates and bury it carefully in the shadow of the ruined mosque. You will pile a cairn of stones over it's grave, and stand guard over that grave for twenty-four hours, without relief, to see that the grave is not defiled by the foot of man." Then gravely he translated his judgment to the saiyid and his daughter.

The soldier rubbed his chin in perplexity. A ridiculous punishment! The officer was as mad as the old man and his sharp clawed daughter. What earthly good would it do to anyone to bury the stork and stand as sentinel over the grave. But he took a solemn pledge inwardly. He would follow the officer's advice. He would never again shoot at a stork.

The saiyid's face lit with grave joy.

"Allah be praised. It is such a judgment as would be approved by Ali of blessed memory on

whom be peace. The just indignation of the All Merciful will be appeased. All El Ragi will learn effendi that the hakim el siyasi who has come among us is very wise. Allah the All Compassionate give you peace."

He laid the bird reverently on the floor before the Governor's table; then saluted with bowed head, his hand on his breast. The girl knelt and touched the floor with her forehead.

"Sheer nonsense, of course," said Galt to himself as he left the room, "superlative balderdash! Falconer will be surprised and amused." But he smiled contentedly as he made his way down to the Major's sanctum where a cool drink awaited him. He had taken his first step into the good graces of his children.

VI

A CAPTIVE OF BABYLON

FOR the first few days after his arrival at El Ragi, Galt remained at the Governor's billet, where his Indian bearer and his gharri transported kit joined him. His pony and syce were quartered in the Military Governor's stable in the town where Falconer kept several fine Arabs. Galt made the pleasing discovery that beneath the crust of Falconer's regimental dignity, which through long army life in India had acquired the consistency of baked enamel, beat the heart of an ordinary, fairly sociable human being. He was indeed an agreeable host and pressed Galt to share his billet as long as he desired. There was really no need in this beastly hot weather to go to the trouble of hunting up quarters for himself. Falconer rather felt, it is true, his honesty forbade him to deny it, that his brother officer had taken a slight liberty with the dignity of his court in giving such an extraordinary judgment on a dead bird. If he had not given his word to abide by his verdict whatever it might be, he would really have been forced to overrule it. It was obviously absurd to have a British soldier, one wearing the King's uni-

form, you know, mount guard over a dead bird, because it happened to suit the whim of an eccentric or demented old Arab. This he made quite clear to Galt over the cold sodas, after the court had adjourned.

"Yes, yes," he said, although Galt had not spoken, simply listening in good humoured silence. The hakim el siyasi was not displeased with himself. "I quite see your point. Must do the square thing by the Arab. But really, Galt, that was a bit thick."

He hastened to assure his guest that it was a very small matter and that he would say nothing further about it. "And it did work,—the old lunatic," he laughed. "Bury the wretched fowl,—ho! ho! and I offered him a hundred rupees. Isn't it amusing to think that I actually feared that old lunatic? I thought he was stirring up disaffection."

"I don't believe he's a lunatic," returned Galt quietly. "Perhaps a little eccentric—yes, decidedly eccentric. But I agree with you, I don't for a minute think that he has given or will give any trouble." And in that Galt was right.

Galt set about securing a billet. This required a diligent and tedious search although many Arabs sought to impress on him the superlative excellence of the houses they proposed to rent him. Galt remembering a deal with an agent in far off Surrey was amused at the efforts of the agent's Eastern brethren. Instead of the garden trees, the view and the plumbing, this house had a copious harim, in

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this once had dwelt a Mullah of the mosque. Allah's blessing was bestowed on this one, for no plague had ever visited its inmates, even when it raged through the town. This had been a caravanserai, the hakim could see that many camels could be stabled on the ground floor. Galt was a little uncertain of the utilitarian value of some of these points of excellence. Finally his search was rewarded. The house was situate not far from the bazaar. From outward view it was commodious, it was well built certainly, and,—a most uncommon thing,—it stood practically alone. Its street front was not simply a portion of a long expressionless wall. It was worth while at least to have a look over the interior, and if everything was satisfactory see if the place could be rented.

He pounded the great brass knocker on the door, but there was no answer. He used on the thick panels his heavy cane, which on account of his lame leg he always carried, still without result. He turned at the sound of a man's voice ingratiatingly low, at his elbow.

"I fear there is no one within, effendi."

Before Galt rose the Governor's court room where this ferret-eyed individual had pleaded for remission of his thousand rupee fine. Confound the fellow, what was he doing there? Galt made no effort to hide his diplomacy, but Yusuf was quite undisturbed.

Would the hakim care to look inside? The house was for hire, and there was no finer house in El Ragi. Galt felt inclined to laugh despite his annoyance. Certainly he would rent nothing from this

poor excuse for a man. And this was the fellow who had lamented his poverty.

"You own the house, I suppose," said Galt shortly.

Oh, no, this was not his house; how could the sahib think that a fine house such as this could be owned by a poor Jew, who had just managed to scrape enough money together by appealing to the generosity of his friends, to pay a heavy fine that the hakim el askeri had so unfairly placed on his shoulders? But the house was owned by a friend, no, not a Jew, a Chaldani; yes, a Chaldani, a Christian like unto the sahib. The Chaldani who was a zulaya merchant of the suq was away with a camel caravan in Persia, and would not be back for many days. Galt marvelled at the fellow's fluency. If he was lying, he was certainly a pastmaster in the art of prevarication. Would not effendi like to look within? It was a fine house, the sahib could see, not far from the suq, with good strong walls, high windows, so that the sahib would be free from danger of thieves, of which there were many in this town of unregenerate followers of the spurious prophet. No, no, why should he lie to the sahib? It was not his house indeed, why would not jinabek believe? On the memory of his lamented mother who had died of the plague, he told the truth. The Chaldani was his friend, who knowing how honest he was, had left the house in his hands while he was away with the caravan. Would the sahib enter? The sahib could now see there was the stabling room for the camels, and they were gone. Was not that

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proof? The house was new, very new, and cool, very cool. It was the best house in all El Ragi for the sahib.

Galt made a survey of the house from vaulted cellars to flat roof.

"What is the rent?" he asked.

The ferret eyes had been keenly watching the hakim's face, and a look of satisfaction had come into them. But at Galt's question he seemed suddenly dubious. Alas, he was not certain that his friend the Chaldani would wish to let the house. Galt turned on his heel. He was not sure how much was truth, how much barefaced falsehood in the fellow's protestations. The house rather appealed to him. It was a hot day and he had been tramping endlessly about town. But he disliked to have any dealings with the Jew, and was as well pleased to have the matter over and done with even though it meant a further search.

The Jew was instantly at his side smirking.

"The Chaldani is my friend. If I do not be traitor to him all will be well. When I tell him it is the hakim el siyasi who wishes to hire . . ." he made an expressive gesture.

"What is the rent?" Galt again asked shortly.

"Ver' cheap, effendi. Jus' one hundred rupees,--worth more than that number of lira. But since it is the great hakim el siyasi . . ."

Galt laughed, "I will give you ten."

Astonishment and unutterable reproach were stamped on the Jew's features.

"Ten rupees," repeated Galt firmly. He disliked

to haggle over the price, but the Jew instinctively aroused his antagonism. Besides he knew something from experience of Eastern trading methods, and had been given some idea of rental values in El Ragi by the Military Governor. The Jew shrugged resignedly. Alas, he feared that he was unfaithful to his friend, the Chaldani, who put such unaltering trust in him, but he wished to please the Jew, and he knew this house alone would suit him. He would therefore make the price twenty rupees. That was the very lowest rent, and he would certainly have much trouble in persuading the Chaldani merchant that he had not been a traitor to his interests.

"Ten rupees a month for the house, but to avoid offending Yusuf from the Chaldani," Galt smiled grimly, "I'll give ten." He walked towards the gate.

The Jew was rebuffing his friend of his just rent, his friend the Chaldani, but recently had suffered many calamities. His dukkan had burned with many valuable carpets. His son had died of small-pox. His mother was palsied. His son . . . The price was eighty rupees a month.

The Jew opened and closed with a thud, but Galt went out a few steps into the road, when the Chaldani bowed.

The Jew is the hakim's to hire for twenty-five rupees a month.

Galt laid down his strong suspicions but it was not until some days later, after he had taken possession, that he definitely learned that Yusuf was

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the landlord and the Chaldani merchant simply a convenient myth.

"I have adopted all the citizens of the town as my children," said Galt dryly after he had left the Jew, "but I hope they're not all so precocious as this one."

VII

AT THE RUINED MASJID

GALT made his way in the direction of one of the city gates. The hot, and decidedly fetid air of the town, during his search for quarters, had been oppressive. His knee had been fretful so that he walked quite slowly and leaned more heavily than usual on his stout cane. But now the sun was not far from the horizon and the air was becoming slightly cooler. A slow quiet stroll in the ruins before returning to the Governor's billet for a chota peg would be refreshing.

He passed through a poor section of the town, lying close to the wall. Poverty! Dilapidation! stench! Mutti enclosures were each the home of several huddled families. The people were clothed in vermin covered grimy rags. The street was an open reeking sewer, waiting for the winter rains. Where were the perfumes of Arabi? In the dust, dirty, fly covered, half naked, but quite merry little children were playing with spinning tops and glass marbles, the international toys of childhood. And oh, those flies, those ubiquitous, clinging, tantalising, abominable flies of Iraq. What plague of Egypt could equal this? The whole air stirred with a per-

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petual buzzing. Galt rather envied those children, who could look at him unblinking with their little faces literally covered with these pests, while he must swing about his hands in an excess of irritation. But the envy was scarcely comparable to the genuine pity he felt. Those urchins were unconsciously playing on the edge of a crater. This spot was a perfect breeding spot for pestilence. Galt felt a little tightening in the strings of his heart.

"The very first thing I do as Political Officer of El Ragi," he said as he passed the gate, "will be to give this town the first cleaning it has had since the days of the Arabian Nights."

It was a relief indeed to feel the desert air in his nostrils. He walked rather slowly out across the rolling mounds towards the massive ruins of the ancient Caliphate Mosque, which he had looked at with wonder the morning before, when he had arrived in the town. It seemed to typify the power of militant Islam of early days. The great conical tower and thick walls had withstood amazingly well the levelling blows of time, which had reduced the contemporaneous buildings to fragments or had obliterated them altogether. Galt was seized with a boyish desire, despite his weariness, to climb the circling path that led to the top of the minaret. What a view it must command. But now as he entered the crumbling gateway a voice raised high as if addressing a crowd, though only an indistinct murmur, reached him from beyond the opposite wall, and with casual curiosity he crossed the old mosque square.

How had he forgotten? Galt was amused. There

was the cairn of stones, no doubt above the stork's body,—not at all a discreditable piece of work,—and there a very much “fed up” individual rested on his rifle and surveyed the distant desert reaches. His attitude was a passive but earnest protest against Arabic superstition and foolish political officers.

“Might as well keep out of the way, I think,” Galt smiled.

His attention was withdrawn to a group of Arabs surrounding a mound on which stood the *saiyid* Musa. The old teacher was addressing them, and his sonorous words were audible though for the most part on account of the distance, unintelligible. How paltry and superficial Galt thought were the affected accents of some English divines compared with the resonant declamation of this old Arabic Koran reader. Of course Arabs are proud of their rolling guttural tongue. Obviously Musa was fulfilling his promise to tell the people of the hakim's wisdom in giving a judgment worthy of the *rasul* on the sacred stork's untimely demise. For now he pointed with a blind man's indirectness towards the sentry, and now his words were for an instant clear as his head was turned slightly towards the mosque.

“. . . El Hakim El Siyasi el *sadiq* mal Arab (the Political Officer the friend of the Arab) . . .”

Galt's western spirit insisted on seeing the affair in a humorous light. It certainly did seem too great a bund o bust to make over a dead bird, but there was a touch of majesty, of native nobility, about that tall, blind, blue turbaned figure, that commanded respect. It would be impossible to

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think lightly of him under any conditions. And as Galt saw the expression of the Arabs who listened he realised that the saiyid possessed considerable influence over the people of El Ragi and that by his rather freakish verdict he had probably made a valuable friend.

His thoughts flew far away. Before him suddenly flashed an incident of a day's hunting near Khanapur in Mysore, where he had come upon a furry little panther cub, basking in the sun, its claws hidden, the fierce little animal wearing a camouflage of perfect peace. The reason of his vision was that he saw her now, the saiyid's little veiled guide, sitting curled at his feet on the mound, the picture of relaxed ease. The little panther was hiding her claws. The sun's dying rays were flashing from the bayonet which the sentry at the stork's grave was affixing to his rifle. Galt chuckled.

"Fixing bayonets,—just in case of emergency, I suppose," he said, glancing back at the curled figure.

Galt looked at her contemplatively. He was thinking of the moment in the courtyard when that exasperating veil had been withdrawn. That illuminating instant had been so unexpected. He felt himself inclined even now to fancy that he had been the victim of an optical illusion. If he could cross now and remove the veil, he would see a dusky faced young lady, with a colossal disfiguring nose ring. But no, of course, that was foolish. He had seen. That baffling veil had one point in its favour. It had kept the skin astonishingly fair, in startling contrast to the dark, weather beaten, buck hide face

of her father. Her mother probably came from the North Country. She was possibly an Assyrian Arab from the Mosul vilayat. The inhabitants of that region had milk white skins, or nearly so. He would like to see her mother. While these thoughts were passing through his mind it was perhaps natural that he should feel quite annoyed at a system which, while helping to keep the girl's skin untarnished, would probably prevent him from ever being entertained again by that distinctly agreeable vision.

He drew back. He had become aware that the little body had uncurled and was sitting upright, and that the veil was turned towards him. Thoughtlessly he had stepped too much into the open. He felt uncomfortable. It was undignified for the hakim el siyasi to be caught spying on the little gathering. Why hadn't he walked out naturally into full view? He continued his walk behind the walls towards the minaret.

He stopped dead. What was that? His ear was assailed by shouting and the clatter of hoofs. He turned back to the breach in the wall and stood astonished. Five Arabs with robes flying, on long maned fleet horses, were sweeping down like a dust whirl on the little assembly about the mound. The attack had arisen from anywhere, like a puff of desert wind out of the void. A startled cry and the people scattered on flying feet, while the horsemen plunging among them and shouting exultantly, laid about their victims' heads and shoulders with ropes and short sticks. Galt laughed. Here was a wanton attack certainly on peaceful citizens, but it was ob-

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viously simply a sort of sport, typically Arabic in its violence. The horsemen were assuredly enjoying their fun. One Arab was knocked down and trampled under a horse's plunging hoofs. When he struggled to his feet he was soundly belabored, until rushing off he found shelter in a cellar of the underground city, when his persecutor desisted. Galt's laughter died, and he rapped out an angry oath. Lamé and on foot he felt ridiculously helpless. He was thinking of the saiyid and his daughter. Luckily for the moment at least, on their place of vantage on the mound they were safe.

The horseman who had ridden his victim down, wheeled, and cantered straight toward the sentry who stood guard over the stork's grave. What his intention was Galt could not guess, but he was brought up pretty sharply with the bayonet not six inches from his horse's breast.

"Well, now, what's the game, Mr. Arab?" Galt could hear the soldier calmly enquire, "I seen you and your friends over there among the roons and thought there might be mischief coming, so I just fixed this pin of mine in its place. Take my advice and move along unless you're inclined to feel the prick of it, mate."

The horseman gestured as to wave him aside and pointed scornfully at the heap of stones which sheltered the bird's grave. He started to speak, but the soldier interrupted. "There's no use talkin' to me, mate. I'm not up in that lingo, but I see by your face that you think about the same as me about this here business. Its a damn fool affair your face

says as plain as day, and you're right. It is. I don't know what you're up to, but if you come around to-morrow it will be all right. Perhaps I'll help you to kick the stones about, or dig up the bird and play football with it, but for the present I'm on guard. That makes a difference though you don't understand. So for the present I'll advise you to carry on your little game over yonder. Work it off on these Arabs, and I'm with you, mate. They're the cause of me standin' out here for twenty-four solid hours, with me pal coming out every little while and askin' me how I like me new job. Well, mate, what are you waiting for? You're losin' your chance. They're nearly all gone and I want you to put in an extra crack for me." And very gently he touched the horse's breast with his "pin." The beast snorted and reared,—the centaur with a savage "Allah curse thee, son of a Noseless Mother," turned it aside and rode towards the mound.

Galt was rather impressed by the Arab's appearance. His flowing aba and zubun were of brilliantly rich colouring. He was an exquisite of his race from the scarlet shoes to the brown suf rings that held in place his blue yashmagh. He was tall, erect, handsome, an excellent horseman, a keen hawklike Bedawi. As he rode forward Galt saw the anger flick from his face, his eye light with a mocking gleam, and his lips curl with the joy of sport. In his path were the saiyid and his daughter.

Mystified as the storm broke about his ears, the saiyid had stood for some moments on the mound, but when the riot had passed the girl's hand tugged

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sharply at his arm, and half led, half dragged him towards the mosque walls. Behind them was safety for her father from injury and insult.

Galt with a quickening pulse, realised the wanton intent behind the mocking light in the Arab's eye, and decided it was high time for him to interfere. He stepped briskly into the open, but the Arab with glance fixed on the prospective victims of his sport, did not notice the political officer. His horse had broken into a canter, and now the girl's low cry mingled with the horseman's laugh as his stick lashed heavily on the saiyid's shoulders. She leaped like a panther at the rider's throat, but his great lithe arm swept her aside and she was cast down almost beneath the horse's hoofs. Thoroughly aroused at the outrage, Galt rushed forward inwardly cursing his infernal knee that retarded his speed, but in an instant's space he had grasped the horse's head collar, had borne the animal back to its haunches, and had aimed a smashing blow with his cane at the Arab's head. The amazed horseman threw up his stick in defence, but it snapped under the angry blow, which but half broken in force glanced from his cheek and fell heavily on his shoulder. Momentarily stunned the tall Arab swayed in his saddle, but his hot desert spirit flared, he rose in his stirrups and the khanjar ripped from the sheath in his belt, flashed up in his curving arm. It was the sinister dart of a snake's head, and Galt's career as a political officer, and indeed as a temporary member in the Universal Club of Mortals, was on the point of coming to a sudden, untimely termination. Galt

felt it, knew it, but the Arab gave a sharp exclamation, and grasped his wrist. The khanjar shone at Galt's feet. In the flicker of an eye it was all over. The pony had swept away and was speeding in flickering dust into the desert.

Galt drew a long breath.

"My sacred Aunt," he said, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, "that was a narrow squeak." He turned with extended hand to the soldier who was running towards him.

"Thank you," he said simply, "words can't express the debt I owe you. I almost felt his khanjar in my throat. It was a wonderful shot."

"That's all right, sir, I'm mighty glad you're safe, sir." He half raised his rifle. "Will I let him have it again? Hasn't he made tracks, sir? but I could bring him down,—for good this time."

"No," returned Galt, putting the rifle aside, "you've given him enough to remember. Let him go."

"It wasn't such a bad shot, sir," said the soldier modestly, "tho' I do say it myself, who shouldn't." His voice became depressed. "Why wasn't me pal here to see it?" Galt looked quizzically at the disfigured face and remembered the soldier's bet with his comrade.

Galt laughed. The attack was over. Except for two distant horsemen and the saiyyid and My Eyes not an Arab could be seen. The whole affair appeared to be a huge joke. No one had been seriously hurt except one of those horsemen, and he richly deserved his chastisement. The saiyyid and his

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daughter standing a short distance away were talking earnestly together.

"The grave of our sacred stork still stands?" the saiyid was asking anxiously.

"Yes."

"And thou art unharmed, My Eyes?"

"Yes."

"And the hakim, I heard his voice, he too?"

"He stands unharmed."

"All is well." Then the tone became gently chiding, "Alas binet, thou art like fire in stubble. Thou dost spout and flare. Why dost thou thrust thy life into danger?" The love of these two warmed Galt's heart.

"May his liver shrivel in the sun," said the charitable young lady, "may hungry jackals eat every scrap of flesh from his bones. He struck thee."

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"It was but the wind. It passed. It is forgot. What is a blow to one who has borne the blows of life for nigh four score years? But thou, child." He shook his head. "But for the great hakim, who knows what harm might have befallen thee?"

His voice rose.

"In my ears, effendi, has been the clamour of riot, which my eyes could not see. My child has told me thou didst rescue us. Again thou hast put a burden of gratitude on the shoulders of thy servant, O hakim of great heart, O star of my obscurity. Allah the Lord of the worlds, the All Compassionate, the All Powerful, give thee peace."

"I scarcely deserve your thanks," said Galt stirred

by the sonorous benediction, "but your gratitude and certainly mine is due to the soldier here. Who was this Arab?"

"It needed not my sight, nor my daughter's words to tell me. It was Ali, desecrator of a revered name,—Yozbashi of the Sheikh Aqrab's hoshiyah. Who but he would make mock of things sacred? Outcast in the sight of Allah. Most like he was drunk with arak, distilled from the date,—that a Believer should so scorn the holy word! Once even in the sacred masjid he. . . . But what of that, effendi? Thou wouldst not understand."

But in Galt's mind the words had stuck, "Yozbashi of the sheikh's bodyguard," and was thinking of the town square and the sheikh's angry gaze at the swaying bodies. Had the attack been simply sacrilegious sport of the wayward Ali? "A man to be cultivated and watched."

My Eyes had approached the soldier, who to Galt's amusement had discreetly withdrawn to a safe distance. He had been quite willing to meet an Arab man, but not this Arab girl. He was scowling, My Eyes was speaking earnestly in Arabic.

"What is the wild cat sayin', sir?" the soldier asked Galt. "If she's thankin' me for helping her you might tell her, sir, that I can do very well without any word from her. If it hadn't been for you, sir, you may be sure I wouldn't have raised me finger."

"She is not thanking you for helping her, but for saving my most unworthy life."

"Oh," said the soldier.

But Galt was no longer smiling, he was thinking

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of the words she had actually used in her reference to the hakim's life ("unworthy" was decidedly not one of them) and the depth of feeling in her childish voice.

VIII

IN THE SHEIKH'S GARDEN

"A JIHAD? Preach a Holy War? Bismillah. No, O sheikh."

The voice was deep, sonorous and firm. The blind saiyid who had come at a summons from his master, was seated Oriental fashion in the grateful shade of a numi tree in the sheikh's garden. The heavy lined, thoughtful face showed no signs of fear though he knew well that wrath was stirring in his master's heart. On a bench, with the stem of a neglected naghilah in his hand, was the sheikh, cold anger on his brow. He had found the saiyid anything but tractable and he was not used to opposition. Was he not the sheikh?

Behind the saiyid, and just within earshot of the conversation—she was gently sidling closer—sat My Eyes. She was casually watching a gang of coolies, who were piling earth as a bund at the edge of a nahar to prevent an overflow of the water. It was not meant for a woman to play any part or to be too greatly interested in this important conversation of the superior sex, but a thirsty little ear peeped

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out, and had one defied Muslin law and raised the veil, he would have found a flushed cheek with angrily sparkling violet eyes.

"May the hottest fires of Iblis consume him to the smallest detestable ash, last of a long line of ungrateful sheikhs," she said to a chanting coolie who was casting his basket full of earth on the bund, but the coolie heard her not for she spoke in a tense little whisper. "A jihad against the good hakim? Doth he not know . . . ?" But the kindly wishes of the lady were cut short by the cold voice of the sheikh.

"Why not a Holy War, saiyyid Musa?" There was that in his tone which made most men tremble, "Art thou not a Muslim? Dost thou forget the hour when thou didst lead the Muslimin and drive the infidel Chaldaeans from the town gate?"

The saiyyid shook his head slowly.

"The hot blood of youth, O Scorpion, I would fain forget."

"Forget? Does not the Holy Book command thee to wage war on the Infidel? Does not that word which is inscribed on the Eternal Preserved Table apply to all time? As thou art a teacher of the Koran, dost thou deny?"

The lines in the saiyyid's face seemed to deepen.

"Nay," he returned solemnly, "there is no hope to deny, though the Anglez are people of the book, and so to be treated more kindly. . . Maktub, the word,—nay more than one—is clear. Fight for the true religion, the religion of God."

The sheikh's lips were drawn in a hard smile, and

he leaned slightly forward, but the smile became cynical as the saiyid proceeded.

"Daily I have prayed at the cave of the Mahdi, that the path may be made clear; yet still it lies obscure. The world is changed, O sheikh. All things are in tumult. In my ears has been the trampling of hosts. To the Prophet I am sure was revealed but part of the Well Hidden Table that stands at Allah's throne. Were he here now the rasul would receive words of guidance in this hour of trial."

"Allah would forbid a jihad," exclaimed Uyuni irrepressibly.

At the extraordinary interruption the sheikh looked at her frowningly. Uyuni instinctively caught at her pomegranate seed which she like many other Muslim girls carried in her bosom as an amulet against the Evil Eye.

"Who art thou to know Allah's will?" the sheikh asked sternly.

"Heed her not, O sheikh," said the saiyid a little hastily, "as with all women her tongue is like the Tigris in flood. It has no bounds. Peace Uyuni."

From the veil came a little exclamation of indignation.

"The Koran is clear," said the sheikh, "it is thou who art at fault. Like all the men of El Ragi, thou dost forget thy sheikh and thy God at the bidding of the lame Anglezi. Because he gave judgment to thy liking on a dead stork, Wallah, thou must sing his praises before the people as if he were a new Suleiman ibn Daoud."

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"That was but the beginning, O Scorpion. Hast thou not heard? Hast thou not seen? Have thy ears not been full of his deeds?" In his tone was wonder.

Behind her veil Uyuni smiled and nodded.

"Greater is the hakim than ten thousand sheikhs," she said to herself.

"Hast thou not heard how he hath fed the starving of El Ragi? He a Nasrani hath given alms like a true Muslim. Hast thou not heard that he hath given seed to thy people for their crops? Hath he not brought back many merchants to the suq who had fled to the desert when their ears were poisoned with Turkish lies? Hath he not repaired the suq? And now hath he not given lira to the mullah to repair the Masjid? Even he a Nasrani. It is beyond understanding, yet it is true Alhamdulillah."

The girl nodded vigorously. These were indeed a few of the many things which in one short month the great hakim el siyasi had accomplished for the welfare of the Arabs of El Ragi. Could she but speak, she would tell the sheikh. But the smile died on her lips. The effect of the saiyyid's words on the sheikh had been anything but soothing. His frown had deepened and he was fingering the khanjar in his belt. She slid closer to the saiyyid for in his eternal dark he was helpless. She was his guardian.

The saiyyid's praise of the hakim el siyasi was the very thing to strike sparks from the flint of the Arab's breast. He hated the political officer of El Ragi with an Arab's hatred, akin to hot desert winds. He had disliked British rule from the mo-

ment the first British soldier set foot in the town, just as he would have disliked any other rule that meant stability and order. Most of his tribe lived in the town, but he was at heart a desert tribesman, and his heart still dwelt with those who drove their camels and sheep through the waste places. He had the Bedawin's contempt for the town dweller.

He had been a petty king. Though his rule had been despotic, harsh and unjust, yet he was the sheikh and his way was undisputed, for the Arab tribesman knows but two codes, the law of Allah and the law of the sheikh, and to both they bow fairly submissively. He had lived two lives, one as the more or less civilised citizen of El Ragi, the other as the desert chieftain who swooped down on other tribes, under the shadow of night, and slew and plundered. He had richly earned the name of the Scorpion.

In Turkish times he had been left pretty much alone, for it was part of the Turkish policy to keep alive lawlessness and enmity between desert tribes so that no conspiracy might be fostered against the beneficent rule of the Ottoman, and the Scorpion had very judiciously bribed Bey and Pasha and tax collector as the occasion demanded. His little kingdom had been practically independent, neighbouring tribes had paid him tribute, and he had harboured dreams.

The coming of the British had changed things. They had not interfered with his powers as sheikh. They professed indeed to be his friend. They were not at war with the Arabs, as long as they remained

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tranquil the British would treat them as friends. So said the proclamation. But with the British came order. Midnight forays ceased. The sheikh felt that he was being manacled, and longed for the return of the Turk. While maintaining ostensibly friendly relations with the hakim el askeri he carried on secret negotiations with the enemy to the end that when the time was ripe, when the fateful hour struck and the armies of England and Turkey clashed in the northern pass, the last great barrier, he would lead his tribe in warfare on the side of his Osmanli brethren. But now the barrier had fallen, the war was over, and for a while the sheikh was content to live in quietude.

He was making money out of the British, more than he ever did out of his former overlords, and love of gold was a passion with him as it is with all Arabs. He therefore continued his life of luxurious ease in his gardens. The main reason of his content had been the character of the rule of the hakim el askeri. The Military Governor despised the Arab, and made no effort to get into their good graces. He governed from an inaccessible pedestal, and quite craftily through numberless agents the sheikh had kept his people in a ferment of unrest and suspicion. The rifle robberies and the outrages which had disturbed the Military Governor had been the natural outcropping of the spirit which had been so assiduously fostered.

With the appearance of the new figure the Scorpion's content had been replaced by uneasiness. It had been easy to combat the Military Governor, but

the Political Officer was a foe of another calibre. He did not stand on a hill. He came down to the level of the Arabs and struck right to their hearts. Through his personality and good words he became from the first a force in El Ragi. Suspicion died hard, but it died surely. That the sheikh could see, and his hatred of the hakim el siyasi grew accordingly. He felt that his position was being usurped. His dreams were vanishing. His people were drifting from him. A short month ago, they would have arisen at his word and followed him unquestionably, but to-day already a great metamorphosis had occurred. The outrages had ceased. There was a disturbing air of calm about the town. Soon there would be no hope. There was but one way now—religion. Wherefore, casting all other considerations aside he had called on the religious zealot, whom, in days past, he had seen rouse the Muslimin to a pitch of frenzy. And now. . . .

He curbed his anger with an effort, and said sneeringly :

"Thou hast long sought the Mahdi saiyyid Musa. Perhaps he has come."

The saiyyid rose to his feet, and towered a commanding figure, his sightless eyes turned to the upper air as though with some inner sight he beheld a vision, "Blaspheme not, O graceless Sunni. The Mahdi as thou well knowest, though thou art a Sunni, is a Muslim. Even here when those ruins were a great city he disappeared. Allah alone in his wisdom knows whither. He is gone, though not dead,—not dead. Even now he may be above thy head, hearing

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thy blasphemy. In the time of Allah the All Wise he will return. Soon I hope. Yea soon I believe."

The resonant words sounded through the garden. The coolies stopped a moment and gazed at the saiyid wonderingly, and when he had ceased nothing was heard but the murmur of the leaves the creaking of a cherid and the rush of water in the nahar.

The sheikh shrugged. "Allah Akbar," he said, "thou art a good Muslim." He smiled cynically. "He awaits his Mahdi," he thought, "even as the followers of Isa the Son of Maryam, think that their Messiah will return. The fools!" and in the exclamation he included the saiyid, but aloud he said, "Shiah or not, thou art a true Muslim. Why is it then thou dost not hear and obey the call of thy Caliph?"

"My Caliph calls not, O Sheikh Aqrab. The caliphate vanished with the Mahdi, and there will be no Caliph on the earth until he returns." The heavily lined face was transfigured, "When he comes in whose veins flows the blessed blood of Ali and of Husain the martyr, the world will bow before him." Very earnestly he voiced the belief of the Shiah Muslim; then in prophetic tones, "I hear not the voice from Stamboul. Allah has prospered not the cause of the Turk. Maktub, it is written. It is the will of Allah."

Maktub. . . . Kismet. . . . The inexorable decree of fate. The sheikh leaned moodily back on his seat. The smouldering fire of his eye was banked. The truth had been knocking at the door

of his mind, and he had resolutely refused it admittance, but now it stood before him in its naked clarity. The Turk had been beaten. What chance had he of success? Why any longer shut his eyes? He knew, he had known for long in his innermost consciousness that this was true. It had needed only the simple, abominably earnest words of the saiyid to destroy all subterfuge. The sheikh heard dimly, for he was lost in sombre thought, the voice of the old man.

" . . . bring great disaster on thy people, who prosper. El Anglezi is an infidel, who knows not the law of the prophet, but his heart is the heart of a child." There was a long silence.

"I hear above me the rustle of leaves," monotonous and level came the saiyid's speech. It seemed part of the garden's murmur, "I feel the grateful shade such as the Koran promises brings relief to true believers in Paradise. I would I had my eyes that I might see the glories of thy garden, yet I can hear the creak of the cherids and the puffing of the makina, which without a horse or a donkey drives the cool water down thy nahars to give life to thy crops and thy trees. The odour of the numi, the portocal and the mish mish and other fruit is strong in my nostrils. How art thou favoured of Allah. Why art thou not content, O sheikh?"

Content? Favoured of Allah? What could this blind senile fellow whose mind was just a storeroom of dusty Koran maxims and who dreamed of the coming of the Mahdi know of his thirst for power, of the fierce longing for the untrammelled freedom

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of the wind swept desert? But the saiyid had touched his pride and his luxury loving side. Hope of a jihad faded. He realised it had been a blind mad dream, incapable of fulfilment, and could lead only to ruin. The thought of the sufferings of his people did not disturb him, but in the disaster his wealth would be destroyed. Had he been younger, who can tell? Perhaps sane advice would have been useless, but now an ease-loving, self-indulgent body called for the continuance of the enjoyment of luxury. The British were wealthy. Since they had come, through coolie labour and the sale of his products, money had steadily flowed into his coffers, and would continue to flow. In the growing prosperity of his people he would benefit, for he still collected his tribute. The British had not interfered with that. Alhamdulillah! It was a bitter pill of course, but he would make the British pay heavily, and make the best of things until in the future Ishallah, his hour might after all strike.

"Go," he said to the saiyid, "and pray to Allah that some of thy ancient spirit may return."

Uyuni stepped quickly to the saiyid's side to take his hand and lead him from the garden. In her breast was a quiet content that there would be no jihad against the kind hakim. A twig from a branch above her caught her veil, and in her quick movement the veil was flicked for an instant aside. In that place of sun and shade her youthful beauty was vivid. With an angry little exclamation the girl disentangled the veil and pulled it into place. But the sheikh had seen and had marvelled. Ever an

admirer of female loveliness he was pleased; all his annoyance vanished.

"Praise be to Allah, the ruler of hearts," he said fervently, repeating the words once used by the Prophet when he had looked upon a beautiful face.

"Alhamdulillah," repeated the saiyyid, thinking in his blindness that the exclamation came from a knowledge of the futility of declaring a Holy War. He felt a great relief.

"Farewell, O Sheikh. Allah the Restorer, The most High, The healer of Souls, the All powerful, give thee peace O Sheikh of the Beni Kelb. Come My Eyes, what makes thy arm tremble? Wait, quietly, My Eyes, I cannot walk so fast as thou. Thy legs are young."

Behind them the sheikh watched, a smile on his sensual lips. Life in El Ragi might after all be made almost endurable, even under the hated rule of the Anglezi.

IX

FATIMAH

THE water of the naghilah bubbled and the charcoal glowed softly as the sheikh smoked. Leaning back on his bench, he watched the saiyyid and his daughter disappearing among the trees. There was a predatory, hawk-like gleam in his eyes, but his lips still smiled, and all trace of discontent had been swept away.

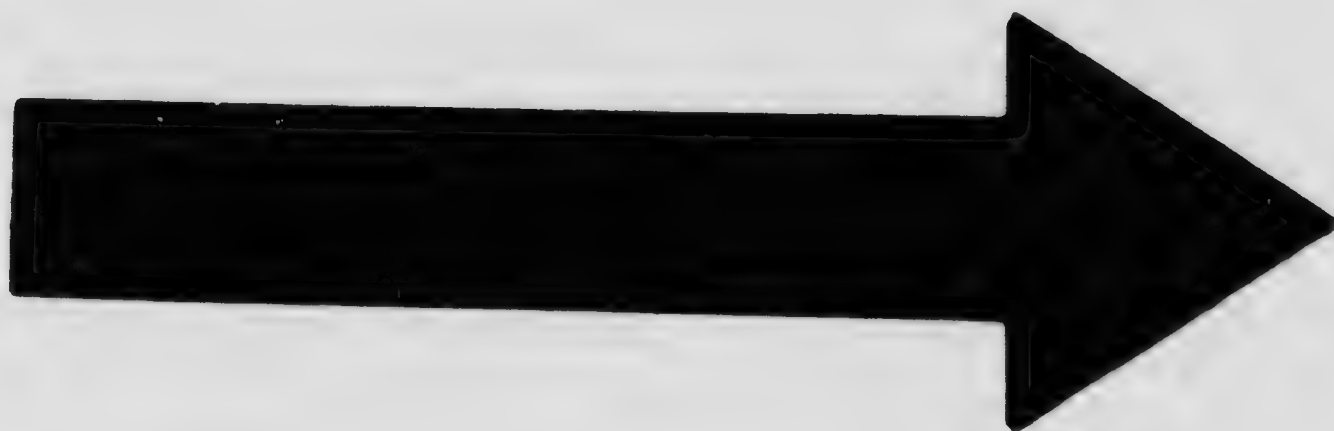
"Wallah, how fair," he mused, "when last I saw her she was but a child, now a woman." He looked puzzled, then nodded: "Her mother must have come from the far north, where women have fair skins. Ah, Asma, I remember, who died in childbirth. A body just budding for these arms, hair like millet stalks to caress, eyes like pools. Never have I seen anyone so white and so beautiful since she . . ." A frown settled an instant on his brow, and his lips tightened cruelly at some unpleasant memory, then he shrugged and smiled. Those were dead ashes.

A cold, biting voice at his elbow broke into his thoughts. Fatimah, the bright particular star of the galaxy of ten females who could boast the distinction

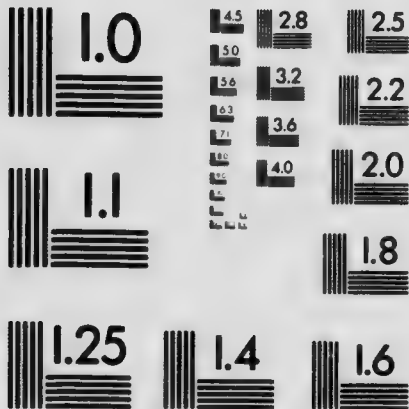
of being the consorts of the great sheikh, had listened to the saiyyid's audience with her master from the shelter of a small date palm. With native shrewdness she usually found some means of keeping in close touch with the life of her lord, and to this was in no small degree due her unique position in his household. That position she had held for many years, (except for one sorry period), though not without many struggles. She well knew the moods of her master, and now with smouldering jealousy saw danger in the sheikh's attitude of contented ease. She had seen the girl's face, had heard the exclamation of admiration, and acutely sensitive to the veering of every wind, scented even in that passing moment, a possible rival.

"What dost thou see to admire O lord of my life, in that brazen one who shamelessly bares her face to please the eye of the great sheikh?"

He turned upon her scowling, and his lips curled as he scrutinized her. In eyes that had just rested upon a fresh youthful loveliness, how unmagnetic, repulsive almost, was this dark face. The skin, which showed traces of negroid ancestry, reminding him that she had once been his slave, was weatherbeaten and lustreless. The jewelled nose-ring which he had once thought beautiful, was grotesque, hideous. She was old, faded, ugly. There were lines about her mouth that he had never noticed before, and stirred into sudden life was the long sleeping anger which he had fostered from the time, years before, when a tongue had whispered that she aimed to place their son in his stead over his body. She had denied, but



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he had sent his son into the Turkish army, where he had met his death at Sannyat.

"Allah be praised," he said contemptuously, "for the branch that showed that white loveliness. My eye is weary of looking on black deformity, thou raven hag."

"Hag," she screamed, beside herself with rage. "Hag, the mother of thy son, the son that thou didst send to his death; unnatural father. White loveliness! What is white beauty to thee, thou Arab? Hast thou forgot the white Anglezi woman?" She did not notice the stormy silence of her lord as she pointed to the brown pinnacle of a hill, just visible through the trees in the desert. "Hast thou forgot the foolish delver in the ruins, whom thou with thy hoshiyah did waylay near yonder Tel? Wallah, how white was that wife of the delver, but she was not for thee, not for thee, O great sheikh." She laughed scornfully. "Dost thou forget that she chose to be the bride of the river Tigris rather than thine?"

A moment's pause and then the sheikh called sharply.

"Akbar."

The woman looked at him and at once her rage died within her, the dark skin seemed on a sudden to assume a greyish pallor. She began to tremble, and her small eyes grew wide and white with fear.

"Akbar."

Fatimah dropped on her knees and touched the turf with her brow.

"Pardon thy unworthy slave, O favoured of Allah," she begged. "Withered be my tongue!

She was djinn possessed that white faced fool, she was mad or she would have known how great was the honour to be wife to the great Scorpion, the fool ! Pardon, O Great Scorpion, Light of my life, the jealousy of my great love drove away my reason."

Wheedling, propitiatingly she shuffled towards him, caught his hand and covered it with kisses. He withdrew it from her thick moist lips, smiling coldly, and issued a peremptory order to a Kurd who had come at his call. The Kurd's eyes opened in astonishment, but the light in them would have made one fancy that the mistress of the household was not particularly popular with her people, and that the commission to which he had been so unexpectedly assigned was not distasteful.

Fatimah's pleading ceased ; she rose with a sudden assumption of dignity that in one of less generous proportions would have been more affecting. She had been for many years the mistress of the sheikh's harim and the mantle of her exalted station seemed to hang about her. But there was no sign of relenting in the sheikh's expression. There was a half smile on his lips as she was led across and her hands tied to the palm stem, while the coolies in the nahar, their chanting stilled, watched the performance with an amused awe. The sheikh puffed quietly at his naghilah while the half stifled cries were wrung from the Kurd's blows. His expression, rather detached and contemplative, was that of one who had arrived at some pleasant resolution.

He roused himself and raised his hand. The unfortunate woman's body had sagged and hung limp

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against the tree trunk. She was released and led half fainting towards the sheikh.

"And now," he said calmly, "go and make ready thy rooms in the harim for the daughter of Musa."

X

UYUNI DISPOSES

"THOU hast not eaten thy dates or rice," said the girl Uyuni severely. "The rice was prepared by my hands."

She had stopped in front of the small reed hut which was her home and laid an ewer of water on the ground. Unveiled, her cloudy, millet hair glowed softly in the early morning light; and in her eyes was something of the lure and mystery of the vast, shifting, æon old desert, but now those wonderful eyes held reproach. Before her, near the other hut, his head bent a little in thought, sat the ancient saiyid; beside him, near the scraped out hole of a fireplace, stood the vessel of rice untouched.

"Good I know it to be, My Eyes," returned the saiyid, raising his head slightly. "Not gritty with dust like that prepared yesterday by Zobeidah."

There was a snort of indignation from the hut behind them, and a withered face was thrust for a moment into the doorway.

"And who is to blame," came a sharp voice, "if

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a dust devil comes when one is preparing the dish."

The saiyid paid no heed to the interruption.

"Dost thou not know, Thewa,"—it was his other name for Uyuni, for was she not indeed his light, as the name signified?—"that this is the first day of Ramazan, the month of fasting? No Muslim may eat or drink from sun up to sundown."

She gave a little exclamation of annoyance, which possibly was the Arabic equivalent for "bother!" but more probably a little more forceful expression, for Uyuni was raised in the desert, and did not discriminate very nicely in the choice of her words when vexed. Then into her face came a sly expression.

"But the sun is not yet risen." It did not seem to bother her conscience that she could not face the fierce flame. The blind man shook his head.

"Nay, the shafts warm my cheek, Uyuni."

"Well, it is but half risen," said the unregenerate daughter of Islam, and she told the truth in part, for but one half of the disc was visible. She chose to overlook the fact that a rather large ruin of old El Ragi intervened, and that the sun had really overtopped the horizon many minutes. She plumped herself down beside the saiyid and brazenly helped herself from the bowl, eating hurriedly, every now and then glancing towards the sun, and now moving a short distance off so that a projecting point of the ruin might prevent the full globe of the sun from becoming visible too soon. Then sighing, when her

efforts were no longer of any avail, she dipped her hands into the copper washing bowl.

"Listen to me," said Uyuni firmly. "The Book says, nay I know not what it says, but well thou knowest,—it's a sensible custom. The man whose work is heavy eats and drinks in the day in Ramazan. Thou goest each day to the Mosque and preachest to the people—dogs who will not always listen. Is that not hard work? Art thou not old and worn in body? Dost thou want to die? I will wrap the dates in this cloth so that thou mayest eat at mid-day. Nay—dost thou not know thou shouldst as well argue with the wind as with me?"

A look in the old man's face caught Uyuni's eye and held it.

"Wert thou not here when I drew water from the river before the sun,—Allah pester it,—rose? Art thou ill?" she asked.

"Nay, I am old; I forgot that the bowl was near my hand." The girl's brows puckered and then she shrugged.

A gentle shadow of a smile touched the corner of the saiyid's mouth, and he shook his head. "Well dost thou watch over this old carcass, My Eyes, that should long ago have answered the questioning angels in its tomb. Without thee I would be blind indeed, who have no other hand to lead." Again there was an indignant snort from the reed hut. "But alas for thy spiritual welfare, My Guiding Light, thou hast grave need to read thy Koran more often."

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"Always the Koran," came in sharp querulous accents from the hut, and the withered, bent, black robed woman appeared in the doorway. "If less of the Koran and thy search for the Mahdi, who comes not, and more of thy flocks and thy herds, we would not now live as coolies in reed huts."

"Peace thou camel soul," boomed the saiyid.

Uyuni put her finger to her lips and held up a protesting hand to the woman, who seemed on the point of bursting into a further tirade against her lord, and Zobeidah with a gesture of resignation disappeared.

"Well," said Uyuni, "come. If thou wilt not eat, we will start, first into the suq where thou wilt preach, and then I will return as usual to the flocks. Zobeidah, my mother, is wrong. How couldst thou tend thy flocks with thy blind eyes? But also she is right. The Koran feeds the soul, but it feeds not the stomach. Come."

Quickly wrapping the dates in a white cloth, and taking the saiyid's hand, she started along a path-way; they drew near the Tigris, which here took a wide sweep beneath the rising ground on which stood the ruins of El Ragi, then up the winding road into the ruins. They walked in silence, but every little while the old man muttered to himself as if something worried him. At times the girl looked at him and wondered.

"Old," he muttered, "old. Kismet. My life-long teaching,—patience; yet did I break out pettishly as a child at a word?" He was apparently thinking

of Zobeidah, but what was there in that to disturb him?

"We will stop to-day, My Eyes," he said, "at the cave near Harun the usurper's palace. There, as thou knowest, the last of the Imams, the divine leader, Muhammad el Mahdi, passed in the days of Islam's glory. He died not, nay, he died not. He vanished into the air. Some day, as thou art a shiah, My Eyes, thou knowest he will return. My soul saith it will be soon. Last night a voice called to me in the darkness while I slept, 'Soon thou wilt meet the Mahdi.' It is the day of disorder. They will be driven as moths in the wind, and the mountains shall be carded wool. Then he will come. I have waited long, but now I feel my vigil will soon be over. For over fifty years, I have waited here near the cave,—waiting,—waiting."

A sudden suspicion seized the girl and she stopped dead.

"Why dost thou want to stop at the Mahdi's cave to-day?" she asked.

"To pray that light may shine on my path, which is dark."

"To ask the Mahdi if thou shouldst preach a Jihad?"

"Nay, nay, child. Have I not told thee? Didst thou not hear me tell the sheikh, that thou shouldst still suspect? Though it is written in the Holy Book that we must slay the infidel, yet my voice is mute." They moved on again. "Each day thou hast asked, and hast once made me swear on the Koran that I

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will not preach a Holy War. Why art thou so fearful that the Arabs may fight the Anglez, My Eyes? "

Uyuni flushed slightly under the veil which, as they were now nearing the town, she had dropped over her face, but she answered truthfully, though a little slowly.

"Nay, I know not,—unless it is that the great Christian hakim is so kind to the Muslim. Dost thou forget his words when thou didst question him in the bazaar, when the tale had spread that the Anglez would destroy our mosque,—a foolish wicked tale? Did he not laugh and put his hand on thy shoulders? 'Thy mosque is quite safe,' he said. 'But it is falling into decay! It needs repair. Bid the Mullah collect money, and on every rupee he gets I will put another.' Did not the hakim give the equal and more? "

"It is the will of Allah that they destroy not the Mosques of the True Faith."

"And the will of the Anglez," returned the girl firmly.

"Thou wilt ever have thy way, child," said the saiyid.

"But why dost thou go to pray to-day at the Mahdi's cave? " persisted Uyuni.

The saiyid hesitated a moment then spoke slowly.

"Look far into the desert, Uyuni, beyond the great mosque of the Caliphate. Thou seest the mound built by man's hand, higher than all other ruins save the minaret of the mosque. It stands alone."

"The djinn haunted tel which covers the bones of the great Sheikh who came years ago from the West?"

"Yea, the Roman Emperor, but it is not that. Years ago a great wrong was done there by the Scorpion, our sheikh,—a great wrong. Since yesterday night it has hung heavily upon me. It is of that I would commune with the Mahdi. The path grows steep, we must be near the cave."

The girl exclaimed a little impatiently. She was accustomed in the years, since a mere babe she had first guided the saiyid's footsteps, to his prayers to the Mahdi on the burdens of the people of El Ragi, but why should he supplicate the Divine Leader over an old wrong? Why should he pray for the sheikh at all? There was a little glint in her eye, at the thought of the morning before in the garden when he had looked on her unveiled face. The fires of Iblis burn that branch! Anger now and a novel emotion to her—fear, a little of it, had more than once in the day turned her heart cold. A shapeless premonition had troubled her but she had resolutely cast it from her; for an instant at the hated name it came again, but with a tiny shrug it had vanished. She looked with loving pity at the old man at her side, and sighed. Alas, how old he was growing. His shoulders seemed more bent than ever before, and the lines of his face were deeper. Was age, and constant dreaming of the coming of the Mahdi, eating like a scorpion into his mind.

"Be not long," she said resignedly, "the sheep

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are straying among the mounds. I must hurry back to them."

Beyond a breach in a mouldering wall, near the ruins of the great palace of the ancient Caliph they reached the cave. Wide mouthed, with high vaulted interior, partly filled with the dust of wind storms, and crumbling wall, it seemed to breathe of musty decay. It was a gateway of a dark corridor of the ancient underground city of the Caliphs, where in midsummer the Arabs used to escape the rigours of the sun. But about it hung a mantle of mystery. Into this cave, more than a thousand years ago, the Mahdi, a little boy, strolled and was caught up by Allah into the air.

So says Arabic tradition, though there is another spot which some claim to be the actual locality of the disappearance. And the pious Arab awaits the hour, when in the fulness of time, the Mahdi will return to found the Caliphate of the world.

The saiyyid had made his home for over fifty years not far from the cave. Here he had maintained his vigil, wishing to be the first to greet his Master. As the years passed he had feared that it would not be in his lifetime, but now, in the day of disorder, he began to hope that before Izrail, the angel of death, knocked at his door, he might indeed greet the Mahdi. Would not the Master choose this time to revisit the earth, when he was needed most sorely?

Often at the mouth of the cave, the saiyyid would hold commune with the departed spirit, and now his voice was booming, appealing, causing a murmur

in the cave, "La illaha illa Allah, wa Muhammad er Rasul Allah." With genuflections and prostrations he droned forth his prayers to the Merciful God, the One and Indivisible, the King of the Day of Judgment.

Since ever she could remember Uyuni had accompanied her father to this place of devotion, and seated curled up behind him had waited the close of his long prayers. She always felt a sort of awe steal over her, as she gazed into the darkness of the cavern, expecting that at any moment the Mahdi might indeed appear. Her childish imagination fancied him in a thousand shapes, now as a giant djinn rising in smoke from the cave's mouth, and now as a great warrior in shining armour, riding a white horse. Sometimes it is true, on account of the protracted delay in the gentleman's appearance, her interest flagged; there had been days when she had been aroused from sleep by the saiyyid's tender groping hands or his resonant voice. To-day she was restless. She was looking at the parched grass about her, and saying to herself, "I will have to drive the sheep beyond the ruins. This grass is too dry," but the unrest in her heart was not due to her flock's need, but to a few words that she had heard in the saiyyid's prayers. What was it that disturbed him?

The old man rose slowly to his feet. Apparently he had gained small comfort to-day from his communion with the Saint, and there was a disquieting look of resignation on his time worn visage. Fearing she knew not what, Uyuni waited for him to speak,

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but no words came. Possibly after all her fears were foolish.

"Come, father," she said, "we must hurry to the town. I must drive the flocks far into the desert."

The words roused the saiyid.

"Go not too far, My Eyes, go not too far. Thou art a woman now, though scarce can I believe it—but yesterday thou wert a child—and a beautiful woman, one to delight the eyes of men—even the most great—that too I have been told. Be careful, My Eyes. There are wild tribes from the hills, who might swoop on thee, alone and unprotected."

"Nay. I have no fear," returned the girl lightly, "have I not hands as the Anglezi learned who killed the stork? Have I not as swift a horse as any in El Ragi, and do I not carry a khanjar? The sheep are lean and must be fed."

"Thou art a good shepherd, My Eyes. Zobeidah can draw water from the river and dry fuel—no more, while thou. . . . What will I do without thee when thou art gone?" He finished scarcely above a whisper but the keen ears caught the words.

"When I go?" she cried. The apprehension that had been lurking in her bosom leaped into life again with a clearer shape, and her heart gave a wild beat. The saiyid noticed the tone, and wavered in his resolution.

"Thou art fair," he said vaguely. "Some day—it is nature—thou wilt leave me for some son of Islam. It is well. It is the fulfilment of life and

according to the sacred Law of the Prophet. The rasul loved not the unmarried."

Uyuni laughed a relieved gurgling little laugh.

"Is that thy trouble?" She caught the saiyid's arm and pressed it. "I feared, nay, no matter. Yes I suppose some day I will be married." Again she laughed, "I have not thought of it."

The saiyid sighed heavily.

"It may come, Uyuni, sooner than thou fanciest."

Again her heart contracted with a fierce little spasm. The saiyid seemed suddenly to straighten himself as if he had an unpleasant duty which must be done at once.

"And beyond thy dream, child. We are honoured beyond my thoughts who love thee well, and know thy worth despite thy wilfulness. Yester eve as I sat by the mosque gate, the sheikh came to me. He wishes thee for his wife."

Her fear realised. Uyuni withdrew her hand sharply from his arm. Her face beneath the veil had grown pale.

"I will not be the sheikh's wife," she said passionately.

The saiyid stood rooted to the spot in bewilderment. Was his daughter actually refusing the offer of the great Scorpion? Surely his ears were playing him false.

"Will not, child?" he asked sternly, "will not? The Sheikh! 'The Great Scorpion.' There is not a woman in El Ragi but would praise Allah to receive such an honour."

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"Then may they all become his wives," said the amazing Uyuni, "for that will not I."

"But perhaps thou dost not understand. He has many wives, more than is allowed by the Koran, for alas! the sacred word of the Prophet is not always followed in these graceless days. But to thee will be great honour, child. The sheikh saw thy face yester morn in his garden, and loved thee. He says thou shalt be the first among his women. The Queen of his harim."

"The fires of Iblis consume him and his harim," cried the girl angrily. "I would as soon be the wife of the beggar whose hands the sheikh cut off for thieving, who sits in rags in the suq."

"Thou art a Muslim woman and must obey."

"Nay," said Uyuni, "no Muslim am I, and obey I will not."

"No Muslim? No Muslim, child? What meanest thou?"

She thrust forth her arms with a childish passionate gesture.

"Are these arms an Arab's arms?" she cried, "and this hair?" she flung back her veil and clutched a strand. "Nay, thou canst not see. This skin is as white as the hakim's cheek."

The saiyyid did not answer for some time. His soul seemed troubled, and as the girl looked at him her anger faded.

"Thy skin is clear, I know," he said at length quietly. "It has been the envy of thy mother Zobeidah, but are not many Arabs white? Thy true

mother Asma who died at thy birth, as I have told thee so often when thou hast asked me, had skin as white as milk. Thou art my daughter. Dost thou not wish to be my daughter?" There was an unusual appealing note in the saiyid's voice.

Uyuni gazing at him out of the corner of her eye smiled.

"And who could I be, thou blind one, but Uyuni thy daughter? Who has led thee? Who has brought thee daily to the mosque? Who has cooked for thee? Who has tended thy flocks? I would rather be thy daughter than the Queen of a hundred harims. When I am gone, who will be thy eyes?" Gently but slyly she took his hand and smoothed the rough brown skin. "Nay, I know," and she dropped the hand, "thou wishest to be rid of me. Do not deny. I am sure."

"Wish to lose thee, ah, my Child." The tone was illuminating and the clear light grew in Uyuni's eyes. But the saiyid straightened again.

"Provision has been made. The sheikh is kind. A boy will lead me and my flocks will be multiplied. The sheikh has promised."

For an instant the shadow returned to the girl's face, and her violet eyes searched the sightless face. How even for a moment could she have doubted him?

"Yet will I not go," she said firmly and finally, "nay, thou needest not speak." Again she broke into a gurgling laugh as she took his arm. "Surely thou knowest thou canst as well argue with the ruins." The saiyid seemed about to speak, then

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sighed, and in that sigh relief struggled with a grave anxiety.

"Wilful art thou, most wilful, O light of my dark paths. Great trouble I fear is in store for us. The sheikh is a mighty man in El Ragi and could crush us like lizards under his foot."

XI

A GUARDED SECRET

"BALAK! Saiyid Musa—Balak!"

The clear voice rang through the bazaar not loud, but like a bell, pleasant to the ear, yet peculiarly penetrating and imperious. It sounded even above the call of the drab Herculean Kurd hamal who trudged stolidly down the bazaar under his impossible load, above too the clink of the silver coin in the hands of the Hebrew saraf, above and through the murmur and bustle and hum of the beehive suq.

The day of industry had begun. Heavy on the air was the odour of fruits and spices. Under the vaulted roof between the bordering lines of small shops, the moving crowd seemed to weave a constantly changing web of many colours. Here a merchant stood outside his shop among Iran rugs which he had spread for inspection on the ground, and in a ceaseless daylong monotone extolled the virtues of his wares, "Kefek, Kefek, a good Sehna, a peerless Kermanshah. . . . What would you? Fit for the palace of a sheikh, and cheap, very cheap, Kefek?" Another, squatting in his dukkan, dis-

played gaudy Jap prints to bejewelled Arab girls. In this shop were hung Babylonian curios, dug from the ruins of the ancient city of Nebuchadnezzar, or fashioned with laudable ingenuity just in the rear of the shop, old seals (genuine), small cuneiform tables (questionable) and strange little figures of Gods and men (more than questionable). Here a darzi cut and sewed his clothes after the fashion plates of the period of the Prophet. Here a kundarchi cobbled laboriously at a new unaccustomed type of shoe, but thanking Allah in his heart that the Anglez pay well, and here a saachi repairing a watch quietly extricated the jewelled works and replaced them with inferior wheels. Who would ever know the difference? The watch would keep good time for a while at least. Alhamdulillah, the Anglez were easily deceived.

Down this branching lane, their darkened shops, lit only by their gleams of light from the roof and the sparkle of their tiny forges, silversmiths and goldsmiths moulded and hammered and perfected their ornaments. Here the Sabean burnt antimony into the pictures so deftly, artistically cut into the silver brooch. Or was it antimony that black powder which he bought in Persia? He would tell you, that patriarchal, white-bearded Sabean, that the powder is composed of almost every known metal in the world, and then he would mention confidentially that he really does not know the composition of the mysterious substance, that it is a secret known only to a very few, a secret handed down from the very portals of time.

The whole suq is a jolting, busy, scheming motley mass of Eastern humanity, from the wealthy Arab merchant, dressed in gold embroidered zubun to the unjostling but decidedly scheming nameless bundle of rags, pressed against the wall and calling out for "Alms for the sake of Allah."

Lyuni threaded her way through the throng, guiding the sightless saiyid, her hand in his. Daily thus had they passed along the bazaar street, since she was scarcely higher than his knee and her voice a tiny treble. All El Ragi knew them, and for the most part quickly made way for them, hand on breast in salutation, partly through reverence for the aged Koran teacher, and partly from a wholesome respect for his guide's tongue. The careless loiterers who obstructed the way she pushed boldly aside. "The saiyid, know you not, worthless ones, the saiyid Musa?" she asked sharply.

She had scant patience with those who did not promptly recognise the saiyid and give him due deference. For years he had come daily through the bazaar to the mosque gate, and there had harangued the people quoting verbatim long passages of the Koran—he knew it all by heart—and calling on the Muslim youth to forsake their evil ways and follow in the path of the Prophet. He had had a large following and was deeply respected. But the saiyid was becoming old and his prestige and influence were gradually but unmistakably waning. With much heart burning and rebellion of spirit the girl had noticed the change. It was not that she cared one jot for the spiritual welfare of the citizens of El Ragi,

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it was at the growing isolation of her beloved father that her loyal soul rebelled. So her voice was strong, clear, challenging, as she called:

"Balak! Saiyid Musa."

"We must be near the mosque now," said the saiyid, for the hum of the suq was retreating a little. "Look in the gate, My Eyes, and tell me if the dome is near completion." They were indeed at the mosque gate, the place from which the saiyid recited the golden texts of the Koran.

"Here is thy place. Sit and I will see."

She returned soon.

"There is still the great wood frame, and many men are working. But the large hole is closed," she announced.

"Praise be to Allah, the All Compassionate," said the old man with heartfelt satisfaction.

"And to the British hakim for his money," returned the girl.

"Yes, my child, the hakim el siyasi has a champion in thee."

And this was indeed true. Senses keen, faculties alert with the ardour of childhood Uyuni had watched with glowing wonder and pleasure the changes that had been taking place in the town since the arrival of the Political Officer. The reconstruction of the mosque's dome was but one of these, though assuredly an important one in her eyes, for she was a Muslim, and the mosque was a very sacred edifice. With a natural predisposition to cleanliness herself, she was pleased to notice the squalor and evil smells

vanishing from the bazaar and the streets of El Ragi. She had indeed spoken her mind freely to two women who were incensed at the proclamation of the Political Officer's that houses and enclosures must be kept clean. What business was it of the hakim's in the name of Allah whether these houses were clean or like the pit of Gehenna? They condoled with each other. Why should the hakuma interfere with an Arab's household? The Turkish Pasha (Allah rest him! Would that he were back in El Ragi) had never interfered in the slightest with the secret, though unsanitary, precincts of the Arab's castle. Did not Allah bid them wash before prayer? Uyuni had asked, to which they replied, "Yes, but not our houses." Whereat Uyuni had in anger upraised them, saying the wise kindly hakim wished to prevent disease coming to their homes, which ridiculous idea roused their scornful merriment. What had dirt to do with disease, which was the judgment of Allah? This weighty argument Uyuni had naturally been unable to combat, but had replied with no less assurance that it was the will of the hakim, and that the hakim had more wisdom in his head than in the combined heads of all the citizens of El Ragi, together with their children, even to the third and fourth generation. Therefore his orders must be obeyed.

The roof of the bazaar, which in the days of dilapidation, injustice and penury under Turkish rule had fallen into decay, had now been repaired. Deserted stalls were again tenanted. Prosperity was in the air. Disease from whatever cause, was cer-

tainly decreasing. A new order of things was being established ; and through it all Uyuni saw but one thing, the hand of that wonderful being El Araj the lame One, the great hakim el siyasi.

She read each new proclamation with content and wonder. She had been taught to read the Koran by the saiyid, by the expedient of looking at the text while he quoted. And now she read to him the edicts of the great hakim. She wondered if there was anything that the hakim did not know. Deep in her soul she raised an altar, a little golden domed mosque, to the great infidel. The existence of that little altar of worship she jealously guarded even from her father. She got secret joy from the feeling that it formed an intangible link between her obscure self and the great foreigner. He was constantly in her childish dreams. While curled on a mound tending her flocks, the sheep grazing about her, she would fill her mind with fanciful images of his life in that distant country whence he came, the strange land where there was no desert,—that the saiyid had told her,—the land which brought forth those countless yellow clad troops that she had often watched marching across the desert in a cloud of dust, the land where a man took unto himself only one wife. She wondered how he had become lame. She knew it was in the war, and her passionate little soul hated the Turks who had maimed him.

There were times when her thoughts of the English hakim were tinged with fear for him. The hakim was too careless of his own welfare in his zeal for the good of the Arab. He had told the people, " I

am your friend, not your enemy," and his deeds had proved this true, but there were those in El Ragi—she felt an almost personal resentment against them, who did not value his friendship. She had heard the gossip of the suq. There were those who felt themselves injured by his impartial justice, those who had been publicly lashed or otherwise punished for their crimes; there were still some Turkish sympathisers in El Ragi, and then, above all, there was the detested sheikh who hated him, and would relish the chance of injuring the good hakim. And yet nightly she had heard he visited the gahwas, unarmed and mingled freely with the people. Some day she feared some harm would befall him.

She seemed to have forgotten that she must hurry back to her flocks that strayed among the ruins. Perhaps after all she had just deluded herself with the idea that it was her sheep that had made her anxious to reach the town early. While her father began to drone forth, El Fatihat "Praise be to God, the creator, the Merciful, the Lord of the Day of Judgment . . ." she was watching with a little suffocating contraction in her breast, for the distinctive halting step among the Arabs. Had he already passed? She felt a little aching sense of disappointment. He usually walked along the bazaar each morning about this time towards the house, near the end of the suq's avenue which bore the sign "hakim el siyasi." Ah! there he was now, standing at the opening of the lane of the silver-smiths. He was talking to the Jewish merchant Musini. Eagerly, but with that strange feeling in

her bosom, she followed every stage of his progress through the crowd. He did not to-day wear Arab clothes as he sometimes did to please the citizens. Probably to-day he held court to settle disputes of his people, or punish some wrong doer. In that uniform of yellow, with the stars, the ribbon of blue and white, and that white badge on his tunic collar he seemed so unapproachable, so exalted. She wished he would always wear the aba and the zubun, she then felt closer to him. To-day the Political Officer had on a pair of "shorts," that article of clothing which, to the fastidious westerner seems rather inelegant, but which is so comfortable in a hot climate. The inelegance of the costume never occurred to Uyuni, though Arab men, except the coolies, wore robes to their feet. She saw only the bandage that bound his injured knee, and she felt again the twinge of anger against the offending Turks. Would the great hakim stop to-day for a word with the saiyyid? Usually he did, and on those days the world was bright, and she went off to her locks with a light heart.

"Sabbahak Allah Bil Kher." It was her father's greeting as he rose to his feet. Had she thought she might have wondered how the blind man could have known that the hakim was approaching. She would not have guessed that the finger tips which had rested on the saiyyid's shoulders as he sat, had given their unconscious message.

"You must have second sight, saiyyid Musa, as they say all the blind possess," said the hakim in his accent of foreign flavour, "or is my limp so

distinct that even in the crowd your ear can detect it? But of course, Uyuni told you, though I did not see her speak as I came up, and I can't imagine how she sees from behind that abominable veil."

"Yes, Uyuni told me," said the saiyid.

"I told thee," she exclaimed in quite natural surprise.

"Yea," said the saiyid.

"I said not one word," argued the girl, quite truthfully. The saiyid seemed about to speak, but some thought on a sudden held his tongue.

The hakim laughed. "Here is a mystery and I haven't the key. How are your flocks, saiyid Musa?"

"Well, sahib."

"Good. I hope no more of your storks have been killed by the Infidel."

The hakim was jesting. How he could joke about such matters the saiyid could not understand, but then of course he was an unbeliever.

"No, effendi."

"No more Arabs have been beating you across the back with sticks?"

"No, effendi."

"Then Uyuni has not been flying at more men's throats, or tearing out any more of my soldier's eyes with those little nails." Smilingly he reached out and took her hand, "What small hands to do so much mischief. Is that henna on your nails, or is it the blood of your victims?"

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The hand trembled an instant in his clasp and then lay still.

"Are you not well?" asked the hakim, his smile giving way to gravity for a moment.

"She is well," returned the saiyyid solemnly.

"In the name of Allah," queried Galt a little tartly, "has the girl not a tongue as well as her fingers? It may not be Arabic custom to ask a lady after her health, but I am an ignorant unbeliever, and I wish to know."

"I am well, effendi," said the girl. Praise be to Allah for the veil that shrouded her agitation.

Galt's good humour at once returned. He looked at that baffling veil. He was thinking of the beautiful face behind that obstruction.

"Veil wearing is a ridiculous custom, saiyyid Musa," he said. "In my country women go about with their faces uncovered, and why shouldn't they?"

The saiyyid shrugged, he did not care to tell the great hakim what he thought.

"How is a good looking girl to get the right sort of a husband otherwise? I believe I'll make a law that only ugly women should wear veils. Quite an idea! I wonder I haven't thought of it before." Very gravely the saiyyid listened to the hakim's pleasantries. "If I hadn't caught sight of your face, Uyuni, I might easily imagine you as unprepossessing as a coolie negress, instead of a very charming young lady."

Could it be possible that even to the great hakim she appeared fair? A bird's wing fluttered in her breast.

"Confound the veil," said the hakim to himself, "I think I'll have another dekkko." He spoke this time in English except for the one Hindustani word that has been incorporated into the vocabulary of the British Indian soldier. He took a step forward, but the girl with a suffocating feeling at her throat stepped back.

"It is not meet, sahib." He had sensed the hakim's intention. "A girl's face may not be uncovered save in the presence of her kindred."

Galt was nettled but just for a moment. He felt rather ashamed of himself. According to his view of course a desire to look at a pretty girl's face was certainly not a very great crime, but to theirs it was, ridiculous certainly, but then it was the custom of the land.

"Very well, little girl," he said with a kindly smile, "don't be afraid. I will not affront your maidenly modesty." He laid his hand on her head. "I must be getting along. Fi aman illah, saiyid Musa, and you," he bowed. "Modesty, effendina."

He left her standing rigid, mute, wondering. The saiyid spoke to her, but she did not hear. The moments that had just passed since he had held her hand in his had been an eternity fraught with endless cycles of bewildering change. His kindly words and the gentle pressure of his fingers had opened her eyes, within her breast a budding flower had broken into bloom. She realised now what the gold domed mosque which she had raised in her heart contained. She knew that she loved the great hakim

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with a woman's love. Silent, abashed, wondering, she looked upon her new strange world as one who gazes at the unfolding glories of an Eastern sunrise.

XII

A REVERSION TO TYPE

INDISTINCTLY she heard the words, deep, solemn and pitying of the saiyid, a voice calling to her from the outer darkness.

"I felt the clutch of thy fingers on my shoulder child. It said to me 'He is near.' Alas, My Eyes, it told me more. Great is the hakim and great are his works, but knowest thou not he is an infidel, a follower of the Son of Mary? It is a deadly sin in the sight of Allah by the sacred Law to let thy maiden thoughts dwell on him. Better far that thou wert the bride of the sheikh."

She felt no great wonder that her father had probed her secret. Despite his blindness, nothing could long be hid from the all discerning inner eye. Since earliest childhood she had held his wisdom in respect, and now he called this curious, joyous thing born within her, a wrong before Allah. The Koran forbade her to love. The Koran she knew was the great Law. It had been revealed to the Prophet by the Angel Gabriel. It was written on the Well Guarded Table. She had often pictured that glit-

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tering tablet, standing beside the golden throne on which sat the great sheikh of the world, surrounded by his Angels. She would never have dreamed of doubting the slightest word of the Koran, but now her savage little soul knew revolt. In her heart had been raised another golden tablet.

"He is a Nasrani," she said fiercely. "If he were a Yezidi, who worships Satan, I would sooner be his slave than the sheikh's wife."

"Allah pardon thee, child. My Eyes, My Eyes, and thou art a Muslim. I have never raised my hand to thee, but well thou deservest to be scourged,—child, child." The saiyid was much distressed.

Uyuni answered and the saiyid listened in silent wonder to the voice of a woman, no longer a child.

"Before I enter the sheikh's harim, this body will be bride to the jackal's fang and the vulture's beak. Know that well, O my father. I love the hakim. If that be a sin in Allah's sight I care not, for I know well I will love him till I die. But have no fear. Am I not a Muslim? Am I not an Arab?" She laughed and her laugh was hard and tinged with a curious bitterness. "Think thou I am more than dust under the hakim's feet? My love is locked here," and she struck herself on the breast with her little clenched hand, "No one—Bismillah not the hakim—shall have the key to see, and jest."

When she had gone off to her flocks, the saiyid seated in the shadow of the mosque wall remained long in solemn thought.

"A Muslim, a true Muslim, always a true Muslim she must be," he said sternly, but his face clouded, "Bride of the jackal's tooth! Bismillah, she means it. An ill word I will give to the Scorpion's ear. Clouds gather about us, Uyuni, light of my dull path." His face set towards the Kaabab, and he prayed again to the most Merciful, the God of the Universe, the King of the Day of Judgment.

A merchant squatting in his dukkan spoke to a stranger from the Euphrates, who had come to El Ragi in a caravan.

"Saiyid Musa is becoming very old. His voice is hollow, never have I seen his shoulders bend so. Soon he will answer the knock of the angel Izrail. Hast thou not heard of Saiyid Musa? I thought there could be no one from Qurnah to Mosul who would say so. For years, long before these eyes saw light, he has sat every day at that very spot, preaching the Koran. He is stone blind, yet there was a time when his voice brought hundreds about him, and these went away the better for his preaching, for he is wise. But even the wisest of men become old, and now look you, there is scarce one who stops. . . . I fear he is a little mad, listen."

To their ears came the monotonous half chant, "The mountains shall be as carded wool before the wind. On that day the Heavens shall be cloven in sunder by the clouds, and the angels shall descend. On that day the kingdom shall of right belong wholly to the Believer, and that day shall be grievous for the unbelievers. . . ."

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"He is a shiah," continued the merchant. "For which Aliah forgive him. He thinks that the Mahdi will soon come to the earth and that the Day of Judgment is at hand. Yet wise he is and pious. He is the well rubbed palm stem. Many still come to him for counsel, and intercession on their behalf on the last day. How hollow and weary seems his voice. Something seems to hang heavy upon him. Those beads are the purest amber, my friend. Rub them thus in thy hands and you will catch the aroma. There are many spurious articles these days. This is genuine.

"This horseman in the suq,—look is the Sheikh of the Beni Kelb, the Scorpion. See his stirrups as he passes. The jewels in them are worth many lira, and his saddle cloth is heavy with pure gold. These are the men of his Hoshiyah who follow. Look at Ali, see his horse has crushed that old man to the wall, but he heeds not. He does not even turn his head. Allah prosper him not. See how his arm hangs limp." He lowered his voice now for the horsemen were passing. "An Anglezi soldier shot him. I was told by one who saw from the opening of a cave where he had been driven by Ali. He was drawing his khanjar on our good hakim el siyasi—Allah give him grace. Would that he had shot him through the heart,—Our good hakim el siyasi who brought the doctor to cure my daughter Zuleika, who lay sick of the Red plague, which leaves the face pitted like a hornet's nest. Allah be praised, she is well again, and there is not one hole in her skin, and now she can be married to the silk merchant

yonder, who loves her and has but one other wife. Alhamdulillah."

The Arab from the Euphrates nodded. The Political Officer and their ways were not a novelty to him. In the town whence he came there had been a hakim el siyasi for many months. He had had experience of the doctors too which the political officers bring to tend the Arab sick. But the garrulous merchant caught his arm and pointed.

"See," he said, "what is coming off here?"

The cavalcade had stopped opposite the saiyid who was now on his feet, and the sheikh was speaking to him. The saiyid's answer was quiet, but had a strange effect on the sheikh and his hoshiyah. The Scorpion frowned and Ali laughed in scorn. Again the old Koran teacher spoke, and this time the sheikh struck him across the face deliberately with his whip, and rode on followed by Ali, who still laughed, and the rest of the hoshiyah who whispered together. Of the strange proceeding the merchant could not offer an explanation. How could he have guessed that the great Scorpion, Sheikh of the Beni Kelb, had just received the astounding intelligence that a plain daughter of the people had unequivocally refused the honour of an alliance with his High Mightiness, and that the father of the misguided young lady would not, or could not, prevail upon her to see the error of her ways?

In another part of the town the hakim el siyasi was enduring a few minutes of embarrassment. Just as he was entering the gateway of his office, he was accosted by a young woman with a babe in her arms,

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and was forced to submit to the osculations applied tearfully to his hand, of a most delighted, grateful mother, who sobbingly bade him to look at the eyes of her child. Whereas but yesterday he was blind, behold he could now see.

"Now, my good woman," Galt protested, "go and thank the doctor for that. It was he who cured your child." But the young woman was not deterred.

"I have done that," she quavered, "Wallah, I have indeed given thanks to the good doctor. But was it not thee, O blessed of Allah, who brought the doctor to El Ragi, and was it not thee who didst look at the closed eyes of my child and lead me at once to the doctor, while I, fool that I was, protested?"

The hakim frowned. A crowd was collecting at the woman's actions and outcries. He had an Englishman's dislike of a scene, though he had also a natural feeling of thankfulness that the doctor's ministrations had been successful. The blind of El Ragi had filled him with pity. Here at least was a brand snatched from the burning.

"Alhamdulillah, my boy will see." Again she kissed the hakim's hand, and the Arabs listened to her words in growing wonder. "I took my boy to the Arab woman El Dawa, and she blistered his arm with flaming faggots—the mark is plain—until it bled, and bound it with the skin of numi. I brought him to the tomb of Hajji Khamsin, where all El Ragians go to be cured of disease. I dipped his tiny

fingers in henna and made a red print on the white wall as all others have done. I lighted a fire and left offerings at the tomb and prayed to Allah, but his eyes were still sealed. As I came from the tomb thou sawest me, O great hakim, and led me to the Anglezi doctor, and lo! he put a magic liquid on my son's eyelids." How could she know it was simply boracic solution, and yet indeed it was a magic solution for without it the child's eyes would never have been opened in this life—"And lo! his eyes were made whole."

As if to ratify the mother's words, the naked little fellow rolled and crowed in the shelter of her arm.

The crowd drew closer, and as if answering to some summons, knelt and touched the ground with their brows. Galt swore. It was too ridiculous. At this auspicious moment, when his people were in a position of adoration to the hated hakim, down the street rode the sheikh, his hoshiyah at his heels, his heart wrathful and menacing with his recent humiliation. The Scorpion saw, and his brow darkened. Ali, remembering his still unhealed arm, poured oil on the troubled waters.

"The new Sheikh of El Ragi receives the homage of his people."

But the sheikh glancing neither to left nor right, his face like a graven image, and giving no sign of the jackal's tooth gnawing his vitals, rode past the prostrate crowd, who moved aside to give him room.

Galt noticed that Ali's fingers played restlessly

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with the haft of his khanjar as he passed, but he ignored the fellow. He was looking gravely at the stouter figure in front. He had been conscious since the day of his arrival in El Ragi of the sheikh's ill suppressed antagonism to him. There had been no overt act with the exception of Ali's escapade at the mosque, and this could not with any certainty be laid at his master's door. But there had been a distinct coldness whenever they had met in the course of their business dealings which naturally was quite frequently. Falconer and the sheikh were on the best of terms. The Arab often visited the Governor's billet, and drank many a friendly glass of the potent foreign spirit proscribed by the Koran. But Galt's good natured efforts to break down the barrier between the sheikh and himself had been unavailing.

The antagonism had rather baffled him. He could not understand it. Why could the Governor be his friend and not he? But now he fancied he understood. The fellow's proud spirit was eaten with jealousy. That was it. It was hard luck that he had happened along at this moment when these foolish people were prostrated in their ridiculous attitude of adoration. But that had given him the clue. Galt now waved his hand and told them abruptly to be gone, and realising that the hakim meant what he said, they went, praising Allah for the goodness and wisdom of the hakim el siyasi, both of which were above measure. The woman with the child also tore herself away, after one last lingering tearful osculation of his already beteared hand.

He had perhaps not used much tact with the

Scorpion. He did not like him. He mistrusted the old ruffian despite Falconer's oft repeated assertion that he was "A remarkably decent old bounder for an Arab." But he would call on him as soon as possible and explain this silly business. It was to his interest as Political Officer to have the sheikh well disposed. He was a power in the town and surrounding district, and capable of a good deal of mischief.

In his gardens, beneath the murmuring leaves, the Scorpion sat on the ground, surrounded by the members of his hoshiyah. About them, the bizarrely trapped horses browsed, but now and then they raised their quivering nostrils to the air, their wild eyes glistening, as if the quiet of the trees oppressed them and they longed for the free spaces of the desert. The men were restless. From their backs peeped the muzzles of their murderous looking Turkish rifles. Ali was speaking in scorn, and his comrades nodded in approval of his words.

"Hast thou not women and coolies to do the tilling, thou cultivator of the soil? We are Bedawin, people of the camel, not of the ploughshare and the furrow." He brushed his hands together as though striking off a piece of contaminating soil, and the others did the same.

"Mutiny, thou Chelb." The sheikh's violent anger was aroused, and the circle of men shrank slightly, but Ali shrugged and spread out his hands. He alone feared not his master. Slowly the sheikh's rage cooled, and he said more calmly:

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"Times have changed, Ali ibn Omar, knowest thou not there is a hand over the land?"

"Yea," returned Ali, "times are changed. Now are the men become women. Now is the Arab of the desert content to be shebana to the English, or cultivator of the soil. Some even of thy hoshiyah have joined the ranks of the English police. By Allah, this life of ease wearies me." He paused a moment, and leaned forward speaking low. "A caravan of camels and Indian gharris each day passes across the desert. We see it as we work in thy millet fields. They are but lightly guarded, not more than five of those small Indians, who wear heavy knives in their belts, which they worship. They are strong in the fight, but what of that? We are many. The spoil is poor for us who have pillaged rich caravans from Persia and Arabi, but there is food for man and horse in plenty. And there is sport."

A predatory light sprang to the sheikh's eye, but he answered shortly:

"Thou blind fool. Would I put my head into the hangman's noose? Would thou have the Anglezi seize upon my garden and my home, every stick and stone that is mine, and cast me into exile?"

Ali laughed, and there was a barb in his laugh, but he said nothing for a moment in answer. Indeed he leaned forward and picked a little wriggling brown beast from the grass that curved and struck viciously at his fingers with its tail. Deftly he cut off the point of the tail with his khanjar, then cast

the maimed scorpion with the tip of the knife at the sheikh's feet.

"See thyself, O Scorpion. The lame hakim of the Anglez has cut out thy sting."

The circle of Arabs laughed shortly.

"What are thy Gardens?" asked Ali scanning closely his master's face. "When thou art no longer the Sheikh of the Beni Kelb, except in name? What is thy house and thy wealth when thou art bondsman to the foreign unbeliever? Dost thou not see those who once called thee chieftain fawn upon the lame infidel and lick his hand? Dost thou forget when thou wert indeed the Scorpion? Dost thou forget the Anuz tribe that were, and now are not? Then thou wert a Bedawi and thy name was feared. Art thou not still a Bedawi?" he urged. "If thy gardens are lost, is there not still the desert, and our horses and freedom?" He rose suddenly, stepped to his master's side and whispered in his ear, "The mad Koran teacher who flouted thee will bemoan his loss to the infidel, but what of that? Thou canst laugh for thou wilt be beyond the reach of the unbeliever's arm."

A sudden radical change had come over the sheikh. A thin veneer had been scraped off, or a flimsy mantle cast from him. The threads by which a love of luxury had held him to a pseudo civilisation were severed, and in a sudden he stood forth starkly the hawk like, primal, predatory Arab of the desert. Ali smiled a grim smile of satisfaction, as the unmasked Scorpion, the prowler of the sand dunes, the blood brother of the jackal stretched forth his hand, and

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received in his palm the resounding slap by which the members of the hoshiyah swore undying allegiance to their resurrected overlord.

XIII

THE KISS OF JUDAS

ON the roof of the Governor's billet in the cool of the twilight,—Alhamdulillah ! the nights of Mesopotamia are at least bearable,—the Military Governor and the Political Officer drank their chota pegs together. They had become friends, or had arrived as near that state of comradely understanding as Allah who fashions the " innards " of men, and allots each man to his separate groove, would allow them. In their stark isolation from their fellows, a taut though unconscious bond of sympathy had grown. Frequently they quarrelled, for the weather was irritatingly hot, the flies were a Hades despatched pestilence in the day, except during that portion thereof when it was too hot even for flies, and Major Falconer's Indian nurtured liver was troublesome. They argued and argued, and it seemed as if the poles could not be more asunder than their views on almost every subject they attacked. Yet they dined together alternately at Galt's and Falconer's billet, three or four times a week, and each looked forward to these meetings with satisfaction.

Falconer had a slight contempt which he took no

pains to hide for Galt's fraternization with the Arabs. "You would do much more effective work, I tell you, if you remained in your office," he had said at first, but lately not so frequently, "instead of dressing like a tramp and consorting with these women in their gahwas. For heaven's sake man remember you're a King's Officer." At this Galt would grin broadly, and many evenings after they had dined together after the remark was first made, he wore the garb de rigueur of the wealthy Arab, aba, zubun, yashmagh, ugal and all. There at this moment he sat in his outlandish kit, legs crossed in an unarab fashion. "I daily expect to be informed," the governor would say on the subject, "that you have turned Mussulman and taken unto yourself a harim of houris." "Not at all a bad idea," came the good-humoured response. "I have given the matter some thought, though I think someone at home might object. But this is a comfortable rig. Much more comfortable than that," and he pointed to Falconer's white mess kit, which he invariably wore in the evenings. "Just to forget if possible where I am."

But behind it all the Military Governor held a grudging admiration for the good work that Galt had undeniably accomplished by his singular methods among the people of El Ragi. "Astounding," he would say to himself, "simply astounding how he seems to get down to them." The change in the attitude of the people towards the British, himself included, since the advent of the Political Officer, was marked. Distrust and antipathy seemed to have been lulled by his extraordinary ministrations to sleep;

it was pretty obvious that the El Ragians were beginning to find the rule of the unbeliever at least tolerable.

The two drank with relish their chota pegs, served by the farash whom Galt had seen on his first visit to the Governor's billet. To his manifold duties this not unimportant one had been added of ministering to the tropic thirst of his master and his guests. A keen observer might have noticed that while he obviously held the Military Governor in deep respect, he served the Political Officer with just a trifle more alacrity and poured just a little more of the fluid which the unbeliever loves, into the glass of the great friend of the Arab.

"I was speaking to that M.O. chap," said the Military Governor; "the doctor you bring into town to look after the sick Arabs. Can't understand why you're so deuced enthusiastic, very philanthropic and all that, but haven't they medicine men or something like that of their own? Well, anyway, that chap seems to be very sound; knows his job."

Galt nodded. He was thinking of the woman who had thanked him so profusely for the curing of her child's eyesight.

"Yes," said Falconer, "he tells me that this," and he held up his glass, "is essential to good health in this infernal climate. Sensible fellow that, said something about excessive perspiration and atrophied kidneys or something like that. Sensible fellow. Of course at night he meant. A chota wouldn't do me much good in the heat of the day."

Galt laughed and nodded.

"Yes, after sundown. That doctor assuredly has sense. I always keep my eye on the sun as it sinks, and just as the upper rim disappears I call for a 'peg.' Thank heavens we're not troubled with prohibition agitators out here.

"Yes, we've enough pests as it is. Lord what a beastly spot it is. Not a tree or even a blade of grass, except yellow stuff as dry as tinder, just dust and glare and heat and everlasting monotony." Galt smiled audibly. The Military Governor had launched again on his diatribe against the land. The monocle glinted; the long, embellished exposition of the Major's views of the country and the people who dwelt therein, would soon be in full swing, but something,—perhaps the conviction that the subject was rather 'jackneyed,—stopped him.

"You're a conundrum, Galt," he said. "You seem to be positively enjoying your life here. But I'm a square peg in a round hole. That is the unvarnished truth of 'it.'" He pointed towards the north where darkness was mantling the shadowy ruins. "That's where I belong. Back with my battalion. Sorry the war's over, but even peace soldiering is better than this; polo, pig sticking, you know. It's something, and then there's always the chance of a little dust up among the Kurds, or on the North-west Frontier.

"I say, Galt," said the Governor on a heaven-sent inspiration, "I'm going to send in another petition to-morrow. I've deluged them with petitions and those staff wallahs have pigeon-holed them, but this will be a devilish strong one. The civil administra-

tion is taking hold all over the country. I'm going to tell them that I'm not needed here any more. That's the absolute truth, I'm not. There's really no need now for a Military Governor. You can carry on quite easily. And I'll tell them so, forcibly. It will be a boost for you, and I—I may be sent back to the game, the battalion."

"I wish you luck. I sometimes am sorry I am not back with my Gurkhas. Except for an occasional dinner at the old mess I never see them now. It's a good distance to their camp. But there are strings that still tug here. I rode out yesterday—a ridiculous thing to do—away out into the desert, because I saw in the distance a ration and forage convoy, guarded by some of my little men. I found an old Havildar of mine, a jolly, round-faced, capable fellow in charge. It did me good to see his welcoming smile. He smiled literally from ear to ear."

Falconer adjusted his monocle. He coughed. "I don't suppose you will mind me,—hem, deserting you?" he asked.

Galt smiled. "Certainly not, you old duffer." It was perhaps the first time that he had addressed the Military Governor with so undignified a name, and at other moments it might have been resented. "Did you think I was objecting? I was blowing off a little gas against the Fates that gave me this gimp leg. Why I'm medically unfit, as I once heard an N.C.O. say of a man who had had his head removed by a shell. Certainly you'll write and I sincerely hope it won't be pigeonholed by some stuffed owl in red tabs."

He rose and walked slowly to the edge of the roof which overlooked the bazaar. Falconer watched his slightly halting progress with a contraction of the brows. "Deuced hard luck that infernal wound. A fine, sturdy, soldierly figure even in that music hall kit. I've heard he was a good officer." But his thoughts veered into a pleasanter groove. He fancied he was again in the "game." Galt looked down on the few stragglers of the suq crowd; the doors of the dukkans had been bolted for the night, and down the shadowy aisle he could see the shebana night guard with his rifle.

Down the street they came, the tall stooped figure, stepping slowly but confidently through its perpetual darkness, and the staunch little guide. Did Galt fancy that for a lingering instant the veiled face was turned upwards towards him? And what mere man is there who does not have the well-oiled clock-sure pumping station contiguous to his ribs ruffled, with the danger that it may even be momentarily thrown out of its gait by the interest of a presentable female, whether she be an Eskimo, a Dyak, or a desert Arab? Would not a veil pique the imagination of a stone idol?

"There goes the old Muslim teacher, saiyyid Musa with his daughter," said Galt, over his shoulder.

"Yes," returned the Major absently. He was thinking of Staff Captains who pigeonholed things. "Who? Oh, yes, the old fanatic."

"They're a queer pair, those two. No doubt all day he has been preaching at the mosque gate. I understand that regularly for years unnumbered,—

the fellow must be eighty if he's a day, though you're always at sea about an Easterner's age,—he has come there and spouted the verses of the Koran to anyone who will listen to him. They tell me he is waiting for the Mussulman Saviour, the Mahdi, to come back to the earth. I pity the poor old visionary. The majority of people are a little sceptical these days of second comings, but one can't help admiring his optimism and persistence in an unregenerate age."

"I dare say," said the Major dryly, "but I can't say I'm interested in the idiosyncracies of maniacs. This fellow's harmless, but the East is full of religious fanatics and we've suffered by them."

Galt shrugged.

"Have you ever seen his daughter's face?" he asked.

"No. When I came to this country I was rather interested in the er—females—from a distance. The veil rather stirs the imagination, doesn't it? But I was very quickly disillusioned when I saw what lay behind—dark skins, some black as ebony, blue paint, and those extraordinary atrocious nose rings."

"This one is different," said Galt quietly. "Not a disfiguring mark. Her skin is fair. She hasn't a nose-ring and her hair is the colour of mustard-seed."

"Might I ask," inquired the Major, rousing himself, "how you acquired this illuminating piece of information?"

Galt explained. "Didn't I mention it before?"

"No," was the rather dry response. "If she's as good looking as you say, I would suggest that when

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you become a Muslim and get your harim, that you include her."

Galt frowned a little and then laughed good-naturedly.

"A good idea," he said; "I'll think it over."

"What a pity," he resumed after a pause. "She's like some sort of wild flower now, but in a little while she'll be marrying,—probably some bazaar merchant if she's lucky. She'll have dirty squalling children and get haggard and withered before her time like all the rest of them." He didn't like the picture. It didn't seem to suit, but of course it would happen.

"The young person may have better fortune," said the Major. "If she's so much better looking than her sisters, our worthy friend the sheikh may get his highly discriminating eye on her and add her to his already slightly overstocked harim. I hear he has a distinct weakness for the fair sex."

"The Lord forbid," said Galt with unwonted fervour.

The Military Governor regarded him with a slight frown.

"You told me the other day that you were going to try and get on a better footing with the Scorpion. You know you haven't hit it off very well with him from the beginning, and it's rather a point of weakness in your policy. I can't make out how you can fraternize with all the rest of these nondescript creatures, and not with the only one who can even approximate the role of gentleman. Of course he is rather deficient on certain points which we would

consider important. I had him to dinner here once, as I told you, and only once. Heavens what an exhibition. He ate his meat with his paws, and drank. . . . There were three stages in the dinner; first when I asked him to have a chota, next when he helped himself, and lastly when he drank out of the neck of the bottle. But all that's beside the point. Remember he's the sheikh. He's a power in the land. It's to our interest to have him friendly."

"I did go down to see him as I said," Galt asserted. "He was very cordial and courteous. Of course every Arab is courteous in his own house, but he was particularly so. He kissed my hand at parting. He mentioned that he was going to hunt gazelle and hoped I'd accept from him a trophy of the chase."

"Good," said Falconer, but Galt looked rather doubtful.

"Do they usually hunt gazelle in midsummer?"

"But he's gone; I saw him go."

"So did I. How could I help it? He seemed to fill the desert, wives, donkeys, camels, hoshiyah. He seems to hunt on a large scale."

"He'll probably be away for some time," said the Military Governor. "Of course all Arabs were untrustworthy, but in this case Galt felt unreasonably suspicious. There were excellent reasons for the sheikh to wish to heal the breach between him and the Political Officer."

"The hoshiyah were round as we sat in the courtyard. Lord what a villainous looking pack they are."

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While the Sheikh smiled and begged me to accept his trophy of the chase they all smiled too, but in a way that made me fancy they were in possession of some grim sort of a joke which I alone was not in. I've mistrusted the Scorpion from the first time I saw him and I'm afraid I always will. When he kissed my hand and I looked at that ring of smiling faces, I thought of the story of the Nestorian patriarch, who once visited the sheikh in that same courtyard. I heard about it in a gahwa the other night. The fellow who told me laughed inordinately over it, thought it a cute little example of humour on the part of his chief.

"There had been a feud of long standing between the Beni Kelb here and a tribe of Nestorians, Christians you know, of sorts. The root of the trouble was probably religion. The Beni Kelb, like true Muslims, slaughtered men and children and old women, and pillaged the villages of the Nestorians, and the Nestorians, like true Christians, retaliated in kind when the occasion offered. Finally the feud I suppose became somewhat of a bore to the sheikh, so he sent word to the Nestorian High Priest or Patriarch or whatever he is, that he wished 'the wolf and the lamb to walk together,' as the Arab saying goes, and asked him to visit the sheikh to smoke the peace pipe or whatever they do. The Nestorian agreed with alacrity. He was tired of the feud and wanted to see the end of it. The sheikh received him with open arms. Differences were discussed and settled amicably over their chai, and when the conference was over the sheikh kissed the

patriarch on both cheeks, just as he kissed my hand. It was a kiss of Judas Iscariot. No sooner had the patriarch left the house, pleased no doubt with the success of his visit, than he was shot down in cold blood by the followers of the sheikh, whom the treacherous old cut-throat had stationed behind the trees in his garden."

"How truly Arabic," said the Military Governor, adjusting his monocle, "to kiss him in his house, and stick him in the back as soon as he had crossed the threshold."

"The true Arabic touch came later, when he despatched the patriarch's head to the Nestorians as a token of his esteem, and a princely pledge that he would abide by the covenant he had entered into with the High Priest."

"A delicate touch that, certainly. But after all his hoshiyah didn't shoot you in the back. No. He genuinely wants to be your friend, Galt, because it suits him. Allah and Mammon, the æ two, but the greater of these is Mammon. He makes money out of us. That's the long and the short of it, more money than he ever made before, even with his pillagings. What does it matter about his past? After all it isn't as if we were really making a friend of him, you know. Of course his past is as lurid and many coloured as a rainbow, but sheikhs with a clean past around here are about as numerous as cold sodas in Hades, and you've been hobnobbing with them in their desert villages. It's their lives of course. Where we'd have a game of polo, or cricket or golf, they spend a pleasant evening in burning a village,

destroying the crops and making off with the women and cattle. Do you know, Galt, I wager a case of port, if we can get any, that he sends you the trophy."

"If you don't mind," said Galt quietly, "I'd as soon not bet on it." This rather surprised the Governor, as the other was constantly suggesting wagers.

They went down to dinner and forgot the sheikh. The Indian cook had excelled himself. They fell to discussion, more or less caustic at times on the Governor's part, of various subjects, the occupation of the country, the possibility of developing by irrigation the latent fertility of Mesopotamia. On this latter point the Governor was quite certain that the land would always remain a desert.

The farash appeared.

"There is a sella here, a basket, effendi, for the hakim el siyasi. His bearer has brought it. It is from the sheikh Aqrab," he announced.

The Major smiled slightly in triumph, but Galt was looking at the farash, and wondered what could be the cause of the Arab's puzzled, hesitating frown.

"Bring it here," he said. "Bring it here!" he repeated when the farash stood undecided.

The farash disappeared, and in a moment came back, and laid the basket on the floor in the centre of the room.

"Wonder what it is," said the Major setting his monocle severely. "Hold the lamp nearer, Galt. Is it a gazelle . . . birds?" He pushed aside the desert grass. The lamp shook in Galt's hand, and his face grew suddenly gray. "God!" the Major

leaped to his feet. "A trophy of the chase! The infernal swine."

In the basket, carefully packed with the long yellow desert grass, was the head of an Indian soldier.

"One of my Gurkhas. It's the head of my Havildar. I can tell by the mouth," and Galt's voice shook like a taut bow.

XIV

A SEARCH

"HAD it worked out, you see," said Galt, with a short hard laugh, "when he was kissing my hand. Knew where he could intercept the convoy. How truly oriental."

"We'll hang him to the tallest date tree in Mespot," said the Military Governor savagely.

"Yes, when we get him, but you may depend on it he has vanished into the desert. He'll not come to us and ask to have his neck put in the halter. But by Heaven, I will get him for this."

Falconer was all for going "gunning" for the sheikh at once. Just the two of them together he said. It would be the delight of his life to get a shot at the reptile. But the futility of two Englishmen attempting to track a desert Arab on his native wastes at night, soon appealed to him, and he subsided in disgust.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I am going to take this basket across the ruins to the Gurkha camp. They will not be pleased," he smiled gravely, "when they see—that. I know those little devils. It may take them some time to get him,

but . . .” Galt’s silence was significant. “It’s their bund o bust, you know.”

The pursuit of the sheikh and his hoshiyah began at once, but as Galt feared met at first with no success. He interviewed the grizzled irate Colonel of the Gurkhas and heard the subdued mutterings of the little fellows as they crowded about the basket. Orders passed at once, and brown platoons moved like shadows across the plains, but returned sullenly after the dawn, with the dismembered bodies of five of their comrades. The desert had swallowed their enemy, wherefore they crooned little lullabies to their kukris, and waited patiently for the day of reckoning which must come.

Galt, though not surprised at the failure to ensnare the Scorpion, would nevertheless have confessed to some disappointment. He had hoped that the wily sheikh might have somehow been caught napping. But as the days passed without a sign of him he reconciled himself as far as possible to protracted delay. He was not however idle. He knew that the Gurkhas could be depended upon to play their part to the full, but no stone must be left unturned. In consequence he kept his shebanas always on the qui vive. These Arab police ceaselessly patrolled the waste.

The Scorpion became an outlaw. His goods were confiscated and a price put on his head by proclamation. The hereditary overlord, the despotic monarch of his tribe had vanished from the ken of his people.

When word was least expected it came.

Falconer sat back in his chair on his billet roof

and vented his extreme annoyance towards the constellations.

"Ungrateful puppy," he snapped, "infernal puppy."

Galt ventured a mild interrogation. His thoughts were far removed. He was looking far into the desert, and his face was grave, almost sombre, and more than a trifle anxious. It was an unusual expression for him, and the cause dated only from the morning. Up to this time the sheikh had appeared to him primarily as the obnoxious outlaw who had wantonly slain a party of Gurkhas, and who rightly deserved punishment. He had a personal interest in seeing justice meted out to the transgressor. Had he not been a Gurkha officer and the havildar one of his men? But above all, he was the Political Officer with manifold trying duties to perform; therefore, while helping as far as possible, he felt it fitting that the duty of bringing the sheikh to well merited justice should rest on the shoulders of the Gurkha battalion. But now, since the morning, he saw the sheikh in a new light.

The slaughter of the Gurkhas had not simply been a wanton act of Oriental cruelty. It had not simply been the sting of the Scorpion. It had been more. He realised it fully now. It had been a challenge, a challenge to him as Political Officer. This morning, some of his shebanas, only a few praise heaven, had mutinied. He would have staked his life on the loyalty of his Arab police. His eyes had been opened. He had been dimly suspicious of a force, which had the sheikh as its fountain head, which

had been striving to undermine his growing hold on the people of El Ragi. He had rather ignored it till now. Now in a sudden he realised its strength, and the revelation brought misgivings.

Though he would have laughed at the idea, Galt now loved the Arabs of El Ragi. They were his children. He derived a keen glowing human pleasure from helping them. Perhaps the subtle incense of the East, the warmth of colour, the gossamer veil of romance had much to do with it, but he had become wrapped in his work. The people's awe of him amused but secretly pleased him. It filled him with satisfaction that his power, which was now much greater than the Military Governor's, rested on his good works, not on fear.

Galt had been shaken out of his self complacency. He saw on the horizon a cloud that would menace the security of his power. He had of course the might of the British Empire behind him. His position was secure, but position with his people ostracized from him would be a hollow mockery. The sheikh, as a man, he could, and would ultimately bring to earth, but he feared his influence. The Scorpion was a forceful personality. He was an hereditary ruler whose word had been law. And behind him lay that dark power, against which the puny strength of the unbeliever is as wax,—the Mosque.

"Ungrateful puppy," reiterated the irate Military Governor. "The soda is hot." Galt roused himself and smiled.

"Who is the ungrateful puppy?" he asked.

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"Butras, of course. If he were here I wouldn't have to drink this sickly stuff."

"I suppose there is no ice to-day. Probably the ice river boat didn't turn up, or perhaps," and he smiled, "H.Q. across the river needed it all for the Mess."

Falconer grunted with disgust.

"Sodas can be cooled without ice. Every mess abdar in India knows how to do it, and Butras was an adept. There are the chattis and chaguls that the bottles can be put in, but best—a swing with the bottles wrapped in straw, and water poured on it continuously,—evaporation you know."

"I wonder what has become of Butras."

"I am firmly convinced he is with the sheikh." He was quite willing to believe the worst of the recalcitrant.

"Tut," said Galt, "he was loyal. He was going to become one of my shebanas. But of course even those . . ." He frowned slightly.

"Yes—they're all treacherous, every single one of these Ishmaelites. He went away, you know, on the same evening that the sheikh sent his message to you—his trophy of the chase." "Well!" the exclamation followed by the swift adjustment of his monocle was occasioned by an apparition.

"Salaam, sahib," said Butras saluting.

"What's the meaning of this? Where the devil have you been, boy?"

Butras addressed the Political Officer.

"Jinabek, I saw what the Scorpion sent you. I said to myself, 'Butras, thou wishest to be a shebana.

Thou must do something worthy so that thy master will approve. Here is thy chance.' I trailed him by night and day, effendi, and I found him beyond the hills. I joined him as one of his hoshiyah, and waited the day when he would return. The day has come, effendi." The boy's face sparkled with pardonable satisfaction. "He has come back across the hills. To-night he has encamped at Ain Haleb, beside the well at the hill's foot, where the path crosses the range of hills. To-morrow night he will lie at his millet fields over there in the north. That will be thy hour, effendi." And then Butras did a strange and rather embarrassing thing. "He is my sheikh," he said. "I am an Arab of his tribe, and I would fight at his side against any other sheikh of the desert. But he has struck at thee, effendi." He dropped on his knees and touched the ground with his brow.

"By George," said Falconer quietly when the boy had gone, "you have made an impression on these fellows."

"Perhaps, a little," returned Galt absently. "The Gurkhas will be glad to hear of this. I will ride over at once. To-morrow night at the millet fields, Allah is certainly good."

XV

A DESERT EPISODE

THROUGH the rolling moundy ruins of El Ragi towards the open plain beyond, Uyuni drove her flocks. She had found fairly good pasturage in the old canal bed, and daily she had come despite the saiyid's warning. Brown, white, black and parti coloured sheep, small and large, old sinewed muttoms, and smaller friskier lambs, born a month or two back, all with the distinctive heavy, swaying flabby tails, they made a fairly large flock, well tended and reasonably comfortable. Yet even the best care cannot cope with the great drought. They all were beginning to show the strain of the blistering summer; their wool was lifeless and stringy, and they were becoming lean and listless. They nibbled here and there at the sparse, brittle, yellow grass, and rested a moment in the shade of the mouldering walls. But Uyuni chirruped them on, calling some of them by name, for she had a name for most of them.

"Come, Nyam, thou sleepy one," she cried.
"Thou art for ever drowsing. Did I not tell thee

there was grass in the great wadi? Come, Samin, thou fat one. There is so much food there that even thou shalt be full. Come Long Horn, and thou O Sheikh. Get along there," and she brought her switch down with a vicious little slap on the great ram's woolly back. "Thou needest grass in plenty, for to-morrow thou shalt be slain and thy flesh given to the poor." They seemed to understand, though it is probable what was said by his shepherdess was lost on the sheikh, or he had become philosophical, for he trotted along quite readily with the others towards the new pasture.

Behind her, her horse, free, unbridled, wandered among the ruins, seeking the hollows where the grass was best, and trekking on now and then to her chimmering call. She loved the animal as well she might. It was a small, slim, sleek, clean limbed Arab, with long tail, sweeping mane, and wide delicately webbed nostrils. A yellow funnelled dust pillar moving in from the desert swirled through the flock, wrapping Uyuni's aba about her well-formed limbs. The horse leapt aside as the dust swept about him, and stood rigid for an instant, head high, tail and mane flowing wildly in the wind. It was like an embodiment of freedom, as it stood there, poised for flight. There was something in the attitude suggestive of white gleaming stars and the wide untenanted stretches of the desert. Now this horse, which was Uyuni's comrade and very dear to her, had received a name the evening of the day when she and her father had carried the dead stork to the

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Military Governor's court, though the name was never whispered aloud when there was any human being near to her.

"Come hakim el siyasi," Uyuni called softly.

Before her a great mound towered from the plain. It was a symmetrical brown pyramid, which the Roman legions many centuries before had piled over the remains of an emperor who had fallen in battle with a Persian force. Its sides had been scarred and ridged by the downpours, but it still stood out in the desert, a rugged monument of the might of Rome. Uyuni drove her flock in a wide detour about the ancient tomb. Her mind was filled with legendary lore about the ruins of El Ragi. Her father had taught her much of the history of the Arab capital. She had pictured in the florid imagery of a child's mind, the glories of the Caliphate, when the great mosque and Harun's castle were not merely stark ruined piles, and when the ancient garden over which she now drove her sheep had been a blossoming paradise. At times she chafed, as the spirited horse chafes at a bit, at some of the rules of her religion, such as fasting in Ramazan, but she never doubted such were the orders of Allah. She was a true Shiah. She believed implicitly—though she wondered sometimes at the delay—that some day the Mahdi would return to the earth. He would have El Ragi as his home and the City would spring to life again at once simply by the spreading of his fingers; of this she was absolutely convinced. Most of these thoughts about El Ragi were very pleasant, but into them all

intruded a sinister figure. That was the djinn of the great brown mound. Djinns of course do exist as certainly as the Angels Munkir and Nakir, who question the dead in their graves. Does not the Koran say so?

That great creature, something betwixt man and devil, and a little nearer the latter, had haunted her dreams since babyhood. Particularly in her early years he had visited her. Once she was quite convinced in her waking hour she saw him rise from the mound, gather unto his hideous monster shape, neigh, very like a horse through his huge nostrils, and cry in a human voice very loud, "Allah Akbar." In his right hand he always carried aloft a gleaming falchion, that almost immediately began to flow upwards in a white flame. That flame ate downwards until the sword and the whole monster were consumed and vanished, with one last loud neigh.

One night Uyuni would remember until Izrail the Angel of Death would come for her. It was the day when the djinn actually appeared to her. He towered on the mound, and she lay as she always did in her dreams, quaking at his feet. His falchion was just beginning to break into flame when he saw her. He picked her up, slashed her with his fiery sword and cast her on to the hillside. And thus she had lain whimpering and moaning in pain, until her father had come to rescue her. That was long after the monster had disappeared.

Djinns do exist according to the Koran, and the

Koran speaks the unalterable truth. Did not the Great Prophet bring some of them into the fold of the True Faith? But after all there are few djinns met with nowadays. Only old women and children ever claim to have seen any. Her father had said to her that it was all foolishness, that she had been dreaming, and that he had never seen a djinn in his eighty or ninety years. It is very likely that she would have grown out of this superstition like any of the others that had clustered round her baby footsteps, except for one thing. There was a long lurid scar across her right side, exactly where the falchion had struck her. Wherefore it is perhaps small wonder that she gave the tale a very wide berth, and that she murmured a prayer over the amulet that she held clutched to her bosom. Certain it is that Uyuni would not have approached that mound at night for a queen's ransom.

Across the arid plain, she walked and rested in the hollow of the ancient canal. There was not a sign of water where once had sailed the boats of Babylon and the Caliphate. But for part of the day the slopes were sheltered from the sun's rays, and better grass grew here than on the plains above. The sun's rays were like spear points now and the sheep grazed about drowsily.

The girl sought an overhanging point on the canal's side which cast a grateful shade. Here she sat, curled up with her chin on her knees, her small ankleted feet peeping from her aba. A perplexed little face framed in millet hair looked forth through

troubled violet eyes on a topsy turvy world. The djinn was entirely forgotten. She was thinking of an unbeliever who held her hand imprisoned in his and smiled at her. That unbeliever certainly never could have guessed what a tumult he had created in her untamed breast. She looked at that hand as if a glory had come to it, and she laid it reverently and very tenderly against her cheek, while her heart made a little riot in her bosom. But a dust cloud many centuries old and therefore very sophisticated mocked her as it flew across the canal basin, in a thin hissing voice, which she being a desert child understood. It called to her "Arab—Arab—Arab." She thrust out her arms, bare to the shoulder, and answered passionately, "White, white, as white as that lamb's fleece," but the dust continued to call out hissing, "Arab," and she knew the dust storm spoke the truth. She heard the same word now in the bleating of the sheep, and it seemed as if the whole desert joined in one mocking voice. She flung herself sobbing on the ground.

Her horse, grazing near, raised his head and whickered softly; then, approaching, poked his silky muzzle enquiringly into the troubled masses of her hair, but she did not notice. She was striving to shut her ears to a sibilant whisper which would not be denied, and gradually her heaving little shoulders calmed, for the ancient dust was murmuring as it drifted past, "Maktub . . . Kismet . . . Maktub." To the fatalistic Muslim these words form the last unscaleable barrier to the soul's yearnings,

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and with a fiery rebellion smouldering down to a dull glow, Uyuni gave in with a little quivering sigh. She sat up and brushed the tears away. She who could believe in djinns could not believe that the great gulf between her and the hakim could ever be bridged. With the courage of a Bedawi she faced the truth that she was no more to the great hakim than one of the grains of dust of the immitable desert.

But in her bosom was the secret gold-domed mosque, and into this her solitary soul crept. In its shelter her harried spirit found rest, for into its hidden chambers the voice of the desert could not pierce with its bliss destroying Kismet and Maktub. There she was free. It was wrong, wrong to harbour love, even in secret—and it must always remain in secret—for the Infidel hakim. But there was a determined little smile now on her lips, wrong or not; that little mosque would never be destroyed. There she would always hold secret communion with the great hakim, and unconsciously she formulated the creed of a new faith, as simple as the creed of Islam, "Illaha illa Allah," and the words of the new religion were, "Idha ma hewa, ma Ahad." She murmured them audibly over and over again as if they gave her joy. "If not his—no man's."

"If not his, no man's!" Even if she had lived in Western lands, where the plant of woman's freedom flourished, worldly wisdom would naturally have smiled. How much more futile her credulity here in the land of the veil, where the savage tribesman is

blood brother to the jackal, where the woman is his chattel, and where a man takes his wife, if need be, by force. The whirling dust storm mocked her, but her lips still smiled the determined little smile as she leaned back against the face of the canal bank. Quietly in the heart she drifted into a sleep.

They had come from the belt of the hills and now filed in to a semi-circle about her as she slept, almost as silently as quail in a loud gath; the springy, bowed pastures of the hills made scarcely a sound in the grass and the soft soil. But for their cartridge belts, and the muskets hanging cross their shoulders, these swart horsemen in their flowing robe might have been from the canvas of a thousand years ago. Their leader drew a deep breath as he lay down on the millet hair; he smiled with sensual lips and his gray eyes shone.

"It has transpired as thou didst promise, Allah is good," he said.

Uzun woke, the leader, leaped to her feet with startled cry, poised like a bird for flight. But with a flutter of heart she saw that the men were between her and her horse.

"Ak!" said the leader sharply, and a great white paneled kurd leaped from his horse and came to her.

A little struggle! Strong arms pinioned her, while men laughed. The sheep and oxen gazed at the group a moment, then went on grazing as the horsemen began to move. Her horse whinnied and looked curiously after them. Across the desert the dust swept about the cantering

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horses. A yellow cone whirled through them, and seemed to laugh hollowly. After all, what it was witnessing was nothing more than an episode in this land of rapine, plunder and sudden foray.

XVI

THE MILLET FIELDS

ON the banks of the Tigris to the north of El Ragi on low lying ground made fertile by spring floods, rustled wide fields of golden millet and maize. The black and white clusters which the Arab women would soon be grinding into flour for "Khubz," were ripening, and the tassels of the maize ears were growing long and silky. The ground had yielded a rich harvest, much too rich to be left in the hands of the hated British, who had already confiscated his gardens. The Political Officer had overlooked these fields Alhamdulillah! A few industrious days and the harvest could be garnered. All would be well, for bread was needed sorely beyond the hills. There were times indeed when the sheikh looked back with regret to the comforts of his gardens at El Ragi.

A village had risen, as if at the call of a djinn, at the edge of the millet. Here and there as if the evoking genius had cast them about in whimsical abandon were the black camel-hair tents. The air was stirred by the barking of pariah dogs, the braying of donkeys, and the querulous cries of women.

Squalling, gritty, fly-covered brats, clad each in its single rag of a garment, scampered about in the dust. The women, tatooed, painted, carmined, noseringed, bespangled, grotesque, and yet each wearing the invisible cloak of native dignity, a heritage of the desert, bore water in jars on their heads or shoulders from the river. It might to the eye have been an old village, yet it had just risen, and might in the winking of an eye be flicked away like a mirage.

Its existence indeed seemed unstable enough. The air was instinct with tension. The Arabs were on the alert. From mounds which rose from the side of the millet, constant close watch was being kept on the surrounding country. The sheikh and his lieutenant Ali were now posting picquets on mounds in the distance. When one has angered the great Infidel and outraged his laws and has imprudently ventured almost within reach of his arm, it is certainly well to be on guard.

The sheikh was pleased with arrangements.

"All is well," he said to his companion, a smile on his thick lips. "We are secure at least till tomorrow's dawn." His eye rested on a tent beside the millet before which a figure leaning on his rifle stood guard, and he was lost to his surroundings.

"Tchah!" cried Ali. To his hawklike perception the sheikh's uxorious mind was as transparent as glass. He knew that his thoughts were entirely occupied with the girl now incarcerated in that tent.

"Keep close watch. There is that nullah. It might hold many enemies."

"Keep close watch for the Infidel," said Ali with quiet scorn. "What need of that? If we all slept we would be wakened by the clatter of the Infidel's march. He moves always with rumbling and championing."

"Not the Indian. He moves like the date palms shadow, and it is the Indian who will come." He was thinking of the Gurkhas he had injured and knew their power of revenge.

Ali smiled. He was thinking of the attack on the Gurkha convoy, and the despatch of the trophy of the chase to the lame hakim. How the hoshiyah had laughed at the joke, those of the hoshiyah that is who had not received punishment from the Gurkha convoy's kukris. Wallah, they had fought stubbornly, though surprised and outnumbered. Ali had enjoyed the jest most of all perhaps, for his hand still troubled him. The wound in it was scarce healed. Wallah, it was like a draught of proscribed arak to have sent that trophy to the lame hakim, to repay him.

Ali was a true son of the desert, hawklike, plunder loving, violent in revenge. In his breast smouldered the desire to repay the Political Officer much more effectively. He had counselled with fiery eloquence a midnight foray on the town of El Ragi, a looting raid on the bazaar, and an attack on the Political Officer. But to his disgust he had been refused.

The sheikh stood erect, as if suddenly roused from reverie. "Not a hand is yet turned to the millet. Not a head has been garnered. By the word of the Prophet, the lazy dogs," and he set off to the village in great indignation.

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"Wallah," said Ali contemptuously, "he thinks only of his crops and his women, while there is a bazaar to loot and an enemy to strike." He looked regretfully towards a dome, just a pinpoint of light from the sun's rays in the far distance.

* * * * *

A little wild cat, fiercely rebellious, sat curled up on the floor of her prison tent. The interior was brilliantly coloured, and bedecked with artistically executed chiragraphy, a fine product of a Haleb tentmaker's skill. It resembled on the inside the mosaic work of a mosque dome. Naturally the girl who was to be raised to the honour of the sheikh's chief wife could not be housed in a plain camel-hair ghema; and yet the strange child seemed to take her honours very ill. The tribe's people had been told that she had actually attempted the life of her lord, and there were certainly gashes on the face of the Kurd Akbar to show that she had struggled frantically against her abduction. But the clucking women of the tribe were garrulously and shrewdly knowing. The apparent reluctance of the bride was but one of the ancient effective wiles of the sex,—carried in this case, it is true, a little to an extreme, and likely to anger her lord, not simply to whet his desires.

Could those eyes have glanced behind the veil with which, even in the tent, she obscured her face, they would have been amazed. There was no lurking mischief in the violet eyes, the violet had deepened

almost to black. Brooding, sullen, rebellious she sat, curled, her chin on her knees. Beside her was the nondescript remains of a silver aba, the conciliatory gift of her lord, but now rent into ribbons by her carmined nails.

Uyuni was a Moslem. From early childhood her father had taught her the Arab prophets dogmas. They were part of her life. She would as soon have doubted the existence of the desert beneath her feet, as have doubted their truth. All other creeds were blasphemies. As has been stated, at times her fresh young spirit and body were irked by the Koran's teachings, such as the enforced fast of Ramazan, but the Koran was the law, the word of Allah the Most High. The good book told her that the woman, being the weaker vessel, must obey her lord. But Uyuni had been a child until the moment of her great awakening in the suq, when all the world became centred in the wonderful infidel. Woman's place in the social order had been little more than a dream. She had lived a sexless life, more that of a boy than a girl. The saiyyid had been more indulgent than an ordinary Arab father. This was partly due to his natural dependence on her. From earliest childhood the freedom of the Arab man had been hers, the freedom of the lofty stars, of the desert winds, of the vast wonderful wilderness. The untamed spirit, nurtured in the free air, unconsciously beat in fierce rebellion against the chains that bound her sex.

Her soul was vexed with few maxims of morality. Her free life had nurtured in her a thoughtless morality. Her thoughts harboured no abhorrence of

polygamy. Had she ever seriously considered such a matter even in the abstract, she would probably have said, "It is so among my people. It is so written in the Koran. It is right." But truth to tell she had not given a thought to the question. It was not the idea of a polygamous marriage that raised the rebellion in her heart, nor yet was it alone the unreasoning, instinctive hatred of the sheikh, a hatred born of an unknown mysterious seed sown deep in her soul. The cause lay even deeper. Her revolt was inspired by her new born faith.

She loved the hakim. Her love held unfolded within it all the passion of her warm young blood, but that passion lay sleeping. Her love was futile, and fantastic. As well hope to pluck a diamond from the sky above her,—the stars were actually diamonds in her belief,—as to be beloved of the great hakim. All this she knew, and felt not a trace now of bitterness, but it did not prevent her love remaining enshrined in the mosque of her heart. It was the creed of her new faith that now in her extremity gave her courage. "If not his—no man's." All her passionate nature responded.

Her mind was set on escape. She could hope for no help from without. Her blind father could do nothing. The hakim? This wonderful being seemed to want to help everyone in distress. She was nothing to him, nothing more than a grain of dust, but he had helped so many. If he knew . . . but how was he to know? In all the world at this hour she was entirely alone. The afternoon was drawing on.

She looked on the coming night with dread. Like a little crouching animal, she sought any loop-hole.

Three times she tried to elude her guard, but she was too closely watched. The Kurd Akbar flung her back on the tent floor. Across his heavy dark features were scarlet furrows which might have been made by the claws of an infuriated young animal. The heat, the flies, the pain and the jocularity of some of the tribesmen at his misfortune had not increased his good nature. He could without a qualm have cut his prisoner's throat, his fingers itched at the haft of his khanjar. Fear of the sheikh alone stayed his hand. What could the great sheikh see to admire in this clawing wild cat?

Inside, across the tent from Uyuni, a woman seated on a Sehna carpet kept sullen unwilling watch. Fatimah, the dark skinned, coarse-lipped wife of the sheikh, felt keenly her degradation. Wearied of her fading charms and of the biting tongue, grown more and more bitter with advancing years, the Scorpion had cast her aside like a worn garment. Worse, a few hours before she had been publicly scourged for refusing to wait upon the new mistress of his heart and honours. What a fall was here, from the queen of a harim to a handmaiden. The coarse withered parchment face, adorned with its glaring noserings, was full of relentless hatred. Her jealousy of her favoured rival was fanned by the sight of the fair skin and the dishevelled mass of hair that shone with the sheen of gold. Noticing this with her keen eye, the girl had drawn her veil closely about her. She

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did not wish to add to the forces against her. Rocking to and fro, Fatimah crooned to herself. Uyuni heard her.

"I have tended him in his health, O Allah, the All Seeing. I have nursed him in his days of illness, O Allah, the All Compassionate. He hath called me his owl of wisdom. His son, the child of my womanhood, hath died with the Turks. Since I was his slave the foot of no other man had halted on my threshold. Hear me, Most High, and look upon my wretchedness. I am cast aside like a foul rag."

In a sing-song whine she bewailed the passing of her youth and the fickleness of man, then broke into a volley of wrathsome expletives against the woman who by wiles and artifice had usurped her place, the brazen one who shaitan possessed, still pretended she wished to escape. This palpable pretence (for what could it be but pretence?) enraged Fatimah the more. The desert brat! The Arab, of all races, is the master of invective. The art seems to flourish in the arid wastes, and this unfortunate woman had tasted of the bitterest draught which life could offer her. It was not alone the wound to her body, which Akbar the Kurd had inflicted at the sheikh's order, but the blows of the lash had cut to the very marrow of her narrow, warped, savage but excessively proud soul. Throughout her pseudo reign as favourite of the harim she had held her head high, and had treated the tribal people with a contempt which she felt became her station. Even Ali had been forced to bow before her. The former slave, the woman of negroid

blood, was most cordially hated by her people, and now they rejoiced in her downfall. Now an object of ridicule she opened the vials of her wrath on the girl who had cast her down. But Uyuni, sitting motionless, seemed not to hear.

A hot curling draught of air flapped aside gently the tent door, and for an instant before Uyuni's gaze flashed the waving millet, a momentary kaleidoscopic vision of liberty—Akbar had moved away from the door—how far she could not guess, but again before the other woman could realise what was happening, she had leaped agilely to her feet and had glided through the door. A warning shout from the tent caught into a bedlam by Arab children, and the irate Akbar, his rifle cast aside, with others at his heels, was in hot pursuit of the fleeing captive. Almost she had reached the first stalks of millet, for she was fleet, when Akbar's great arms grasped her. Again, struggling, she was borne to the tent, and cast violently on the floor, while Akbar, cursing her by every djinn under the vaulted skies, was nursing an arm into which her sharp white teeth had sunk. He half withdrew his khanjar from its sheath, then drove it back with a grumbled oath.

"Keep a closer eye on thy mistress, thou black hag," he commanded Fatimah, "or, Wallah, thou'lt feel the lash across thy back again, thou noseless pariah."

Fatimah screamed in anger at his retreating figure. The crooning was not resumed. The body ceased to rock. The woman's beady eyes, gleaming with the

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light of a sudden purpose, were fixed on the girl's curled figure. An insensate passion possessed Fatimah. She did not doubt that the girl was playing some game, some trick that would make her triumph all the more complete. No doubt behind that veil she was laughing at her now, enjoying Akbar's contemptuous command. And she would live, and be her mistress, and order her about as a slave. By Allah, it was too bitter; it was not to be borne. She must not live to crow over her.

The minutes passed and the girl did not move. The day was still warm. Perhaps from her exertions the girl slept. Fatimah waited,—waited like a coiled serpent. The afternoon was beginning to wane, but there would be some little time yet before the sheikh came. She could hear his voice now and then calling to men and women in the millet. Her hand stole into the fold of her aba; noiselessly she drew aside the flap of the tent and peered out. Akbar the Kurd, weary of his watch, was seated, his back towards her, half drowsing in the sun. She looked at the millet; there afterwards would be safety. Swiftly she turned and glided across the floor. Still the girl did not move. Certainly now she slept.

What is it that the British soldier lying wounded on an Eastern battlefield fears as night falls? Why is he advised to "roll to his rifle and blow out his brains?" Why is it that the fiend incarnate when he wishes to visit the earth does so in the guise of a woman?

The half-raised hand paused, and the fingers

clutching the sekkin opened spasmodically. Fatimah could see beneath the veil now. With a shrill exclamation she ripped it aside, and looked in amazement into steady, violet eyes set in a white face.

XVII

THE GIRL AND THE WOMAN

THE woman drew back in speechless amaze. Here was something that positively staggered her warped intelligence. The girl had not been asleep; from the cover of the veil she had seen every hostile movement and had not raised a hand to protect herself. She had believed the girl's struggles merely pretence. Despite her bitter hatred of the sheikh raised by the lash, she could not understand any woman wishing to avoid marrying him. Yet this girl had actually been willing to die. Death of course was not greatly feared by Muslimin, for did not Paradise of cool gardens lie beyond? But here was something she could not grasp, here was a veil behind which her dim eyes could not pierce. She sat down and shook her head.

And yet there had been one other, and in her mind rose a fragment of memory. She saw again the body of a woman lying on the Tigris bank, remembered the sheikh's wrath and her own mocking laughter. In those days she could afford to laugh, for she was still in the bloom of youth, and still had a strong hold on her master's heartstrings. Wallah,

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times were indeed changed. And again her rage rose against the girl opposite.

The girl was watching her gravely, the sunlight from a slit in the tent touched her hair, and Fatimah gasped. That millet hair . . . that millet hair. . . . An illusion—a flicker of light,—a will o' the wisp, a bubble rose on the pool of her mind and flicked into air.

Uyuni watched Fatimah keenly. Her active young mind was beginning to stir with hope. She saw the bewildered look and could not in the least fathom its meaning, but the mask of hatred had momentarily at least relaxed. The tent flap was whisked aside.

Uyuni laughed, and the laugh sounded genuine. Fatimah looked at her in surprise. Again she laughed, and the expression of astonishment altered to a scowl of suspicion.

"Hskit!" cried the woman sharply. "Why dost thou laugh?"

"The wind blew the door aside," said Uyuni. "I saw a camel coming from the millet. It threw its load and ran." She did not say that she had also seen near the tent flap a seated figure leaning loosely forward asleep.

"Why dost thou laugh at the antics of a foolish camel?" The scowl persisted.

"The camel is foolish, like a child, but not half so foolish as the Scorpion," said the girl gravely. Fatimah grunted in inquiry.

"Dost thou think," asked Uyuni in a confidential whisper, quite as if they were old friends gossiping together, "that the Scorpion is visited of Allah?"

The woman was clearly at sea. What could the girl mean by thinking the sheikh mad?

Uyuni took a strand of her golden hair in her fingers, touching it angrily as if it were something loathsome. Her lip tilted in disgust.

"A pariah dog that feeds on filth has hair like that. A Jew's face is sickly white. It has not the healthy colour the sun gives." She opened the bosom of her aba. "My skin is like a dying Jew's. Thy hair is like ebony. It shines like a rook's wing." She lied glibly but most earnestly. It would be a last struggle for liberty, and if it did not succeed . . . She drew a little nearer Fatimah, and now covered with a corner of her aba the sekkin which the woman had dropped.

"Thy eyes," said the brazen little flatterer, "are like the secret metal of the silversmith. Wallah, how beautiful thou art! Look at my ugly, unadorned face. Thy nose rings are the largest and finest in El Ragi. Thou art ten thousand times more beautiful than I. Thou art wise; I am a herder of sheep. How can I be the wife of the Scorpion? How can I aid the great sheikh with counsel? If he is not mad, why does he wish to take me and cast thee out—thee?"

The fulsome, open flattery seemed to have its effect. The woman unconsciously preened herself. The beady eyes were sparkling, but soon they narrowed again. The girl's face was the picture of earnestness and truth.

"Thou art the mother of his child," pursued

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Uyuni. "Dost thou think Allah the All Merciful is pleased that he forsakes thee?"

"Thou speakest truth," cried the woman. "Thou speakest truth. . . . The mother of his child, dead with the Turks. . . ." She put her hand to her breast and bent her forehead to the ground. "Bismillah, the All Merciful, the All Compassionate . . ." The girl slipped the sekkin into the bosom of her aba.

"He is mad," said Uyuni nodding. "It will pass, soon he will turn to thee again."

The woman's eyes gleamed with hope. She believed for the moment what she wished to believe. She saw herself again the favourite, with the reins in her hand, with the power to repay those like Akbar who now laughed her to scorn. Her lips drew together cruelly. Uyuni read the signs aright. She took the bit in her teeth. She slipped to the tent flap and drew it gently aside.

"See," she whispered, "Akbar sleeps, we are alone." She knelt by the woman's side. "It is getting dark. There is no one near. Let me bind thy arms and put a strip of this aba in thy teeth. It will appear that I have overpowered thee. Akbar will be to blame because he sleeps. The sheikh will be angry but he will soon forget. His madness will pass; he will turn to thee again."

Following the girl's flattery the temptation was strong. Once in the millet her rival would be gone, and Akbar would bear the brunt of the sheikh's wrath. But a vision of that rage brought her to earth with a jerk. She struck off the clenching little

hand on her arm and instinctively cried out. The girl slipped to her place like a shadow, while the doorway was darkened by the heavy scowling features surmounted by the colossal black turban.

"Didst thou call, noseless hag?" he asked surlily, his heavy eyes blinking. He fancied he had been dreaming, for the women sat as he had left them.

"Noseless hag!" screamed the woman. "Jackals whelp! thou stoned one. When wilt thou know thy betters?"

The Kurd turned with a rumbling laugh, letting the flap fall behind him, but in an instant he raised it again.

"Look, millet hair," he said, pointing to the distant slopes. Horsemen could be seen driving a flock of sheep down the slopes towards the village. "I hope thou has kept thy sheep fat," chuckled the Kurd, now quite good natured. "Good mutton has been rare among us."

The girl did not answer. She knew that the sheep were hers. No doubt one of the horsemen also had her horse. The sight seemed to bring home to her more clearly than ever how helpless was her predicament. In a flash, she saw the saiyyid waiting for her at the mosque, wondering at the delay in her coming; then groping his way forlornly through the bazaar, unconscious still that he had been robbed of his daughter and his flocks. Her courage on a sudden forsook her, and she flung herself on the ground with a choking passion of sobs.

In her extremity, she called on Allah, who had deserted her and her father. Who would care now

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for the aged man? Who would guide his footsteps to and from the mosque? How now could he live since his flocks were stolen? Face downward she moaned and prayed, her hair in the dust about her like a cloud. The light of the dying sun fell on it, gleaming against the dust, and the woman's glinting eyes were fastened on it. The world grew slowly dark.

XVIII

AN EXIT. NO ADDRESS LEFT

THE hakim's horse brushed against the saiyyid at the city gate. Galt sharply drew rein. The old fellow was alone, an unusual sight. The mosque dome had ceased to heliograph its messages into the air, the mists were beginning to gather. Galt heard an Arab say to a neighbour, "Never in years have I seen him leave the gate without the child who leads him."

"Where is My Eyes, saiyyid Musa? Has she deserted you?" Galt asked.

"Allah give thee grace, effendi," returned the saiyyid, recognising the voice, and halting an instant. "I know not where she is." The toneless blind voice had a touch of anxiety. It seemed to hold a premonition of trouble though he sought to make it light. The aged bent figure was slightly agitated. "Each day she drives her sheep beyond the canal. It is far, effendi, and she was alone. I am old, sahib, and perhaps fear stirs me too easily. But never has she failed before. She is young; she is fair. There are Arabs from the hills. . . ." The Muslim

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moved on, his sightless face set towards the desert where he must search.

Galt had been in good humoured mood. This was the night when the Gurkhas were going to exact reparation for their wrongs. The officers had said quite ungentlemanly but satisfying things about what they were going to do to the sheikh when they laid hands on him. The death of their little dusky comrades had left a sting. This was going to be a night of adventure. Fail? Perhaps,—quite likely. It is not easy to trap the human fox of the desert. But Galt knew the Gurkhas would make a good try. Soon the air would be astir with the chink of bits of the accompanying lancers, who would circle to the north, to cut off retreat, and soon those other fellows, small, and as dark as the shade of the ruins, would move forward on foot, faces set grimly, towards the millet fields. It would be a great night of adventure. An infernal shame he couldn't be with them. Confound the leg!

But Galt's good humour was temporarily lessened. The old saiyid was rather a pitiable figure, despite his natural dignity. His right hand was for the moment gone. There was a line between Galt's brows as he watched him. The love of father and daughter was a desert idyll, a bright touch of colour in the rather drab desert life. It was affecting to see the old man shaken from his philosophic calm by the failure of his daughter to come for him. It was none the less touching that the old fellow's fears were of course ephemeral. The girl was simply late. She

had taken her flocks too far. At any moment she might appear. She might of course be sick. He started forward, then wheeled back to the gate, and watched the saiyid until he disappeared among the mounds. Thoughtful, he rode into the town. He was certain he would see the two again in the morning at the mosque gate. If not. . . . Of course there were Arabs from the hills, and she was young and she was decidedly fair. He called to a shebana who rode by. His orders were short and to the point. The shebana must follow the saiyid, and he must search the desert for the saiyid's daughter. He must not return until he had found her. Then on he rode, the saiyid and his affairs forgotten, overshadowed by the thought of the night's adventure .

Later when the mosque dome was a vast, dim shadow against the sky, Galt and the Military Governor, with Butras at their heels, slipped quietly from the east gate of the town, mounted their horses, which were held in readiness by their syces, and rode out across the ruins into the desert. They made a silent unostentatious exit ; they did not want to blazon forth their purpose. There were many peering eyes, and many tongues which would eagerly carry tidings to the sheikh that an enterprise against him was afoot. They chose a very circuitous path so that they might not come into contact with the attacking force. They were merely interested spectators, looking for a little excitement. It was a silent ride. They were passing the towering shape of the Roman Emperor's tomb, when the Major spoke.

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"Think they'll get him, Galt? Deuced dark, isn't it?"

Galt woke from a reverie.

"I wouldn't gamble on it. Certainly I hope so."

"They'll have him surrounded with the lancers from the north."

Galt grunted a little.

"Surround a wind storm? But leave it to the Gurkhas. If they can't get him, nobody can."

"Hah!" cried Falconer sharply. "What the devil?" His horse had suddenly shied, almost unseating him. Galt swore, for his horse had reared, and on recovering had given his knee a nasty jolt. Butras grasped his rifle, then said quietly:

"A sheep, effendi." The offending animal that they had almost ridden down was scampering away in the darkness.

"Shiftless beggars, these Arabs," said the Military Governor in disgust. "Letting their sheep wander about like this at night."

Galt did not speak. The pain in his knee was forgotten. They were riding close now to the ancient canal. Arabs as a rule did not let their flocks loose at night. The country was too lawless. Again came the line between his brows. Had not the saiyid said that My Eyes had crossed the canal with her flocks? If so, where were the others? The question aroused quite unpleasant possibilities. Where was Uyuni? Perhaps after all . . .

From the darkness before them a neigh sounded

shrilly. With their bits they checked the answering neigh quivering at the muzzles of their mounts, drew up at once and peered into the night. From the shadows a horse trotted slowly towards them, wheeled and made off.

"Desert seems full of stray animals," said Falconer irritably, taking his hand from the holster at his belt. "Let us get along, we'll be missing the show."

Galt turned to Butras.

"Do you know that horse?" he asked sharply.

"Yes," replied the farash at once. "Where could one see such another head, effendi?" he asked, with the admiration of a lover of horses. "It belongs to the daughter of Musa."

Galt swore. What an infernal shame! Something must have happened. The fears of her father were justified. There could be little doubt. Some wandering hill Arabs had swooped down on her. What else could have happened? Poor little girl! What else could possibly have happened? How thoroughly in keeping with this land of passion and bloodshed. That pretty idyll was rifted. The one spot of bright colour in El Ragi was for ever besmeared and blotted out. Poor sightless saiyyid! If anything could be done, of course it would, but to what end? They were now probably far in the hills. A thought brought him up almost with a jolt. Was it possible—the sheikh?

"Come, let us hurry along," said the Major.

A low haloo brought them again to a halt, and a horseman drew rein beside them in the gloom. Galt

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recognised him at once as the shebana he had sent after saiyid Musa.

"I came on one, effendi," said the shebana sitting rigidly at attention, "who gave news of the daughter of Musa. She is a captive in the tents of the Scorpion," and he pointed towards the north star.

They rode on rapidly through the dark. Not a word was spoken, for the minds of both men was set on the millet fields. To Falconer the girl's abduction was of little moment, except as another example of the sheikh's unparalleled effrontery. But what could one expect from a fellow who would send a man's severed head as a trophy of the chase? From the gulf of the dark before them came the crackle of musketry. They rode out to the edge of a slope overlooking the plain. To their left front red flashes were stabbing the dark, and flashes answered from the edge of the millet. It was a very dim picture. The air was stirring with the hoofbeats of fleeing Arabs and the shouts of the Gurkhas advancing. They felt rather than saw, for the night was lit only by the stars, the village melting away like a mirage from the edge of the millet.

"We might stay here a minute or two," said Falconer. "Then we can get down and see what has happened. It will be over soon." But Galt was already urging his horse down the slope, and the Major followed. He was looking quizzically at Galt's broad back.

When they reached the edge of the millet the skirmish was over, and it needed but a glance at the sullen little figures squatting about to see that their

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quarry had escaped. The Gurkha officers were voluble in their exasperation. They were cursing their luck and the lancer officers for failing to cut off the flight.

"We had them surrounded," said a Gurkha officer.

"The millet and the river," protested the lancer.

"It would have taken a thousand. We were forty."

The Political Officer was looking into the depths of the millet. Through there they had gone. Poor little girl.

"Did you see nothing of the sheikh?" he questioned.

"No," was the answer. "Nothing."

There was a rustle in the millet and three figures debouched. Two Gurkhas were bringing in a prisoner. A young officer rushed over and turned a flashlight on the captive's face. "Of course," they heard him say disgustedly. "It couldn't be the right one. Come and have a dekkho at this priceless looking scoundrel." The other officers approached. The fellow was apparently a Kurd, judging from his heavy frame, swarthy visage and great black turban. Some animal must have clawed his face. He presented a strange picture in the flashlight, the stolid, sullen features so grotesquely disfigured. The officers of Gurkhas despite their vexation were amused.

"An altercation with the family pet, I suppose," suggested a subaltern.

"No, no. Just an ordinary domestic fracas with his missus," said another facetious youth. "Ferad

mara sewat hadha?" (some woman did that). The man frowned but said nothing.

The officer with the flashlight questioned him closely about the sheikh, but received little more than grunts for his pains. He waved a heavy hand vaguely and contemptuously to the north. Did they not know? The sheikh was gone of a certainty. He was far to the north.

They might as well let this fellow go, and return to camp. This time they had been frustrated. In the future . . . some day! The Gurkhas had crowded about the Kurd menacingly, but at the word of their officers they formed into line. A shrill call went out through the millet for any wanderers to return.

"Rotten luck," said Falconer to a couple of officers as he mounted his horse. "Better luck next time. Better be moving along, Galt." But the Political Officer, who had noticed the Kurd's frown when the young officers asked him if a woman had scarred his face, was thinking of a certain young lady who had made mince meat of a soldier's face, when he had shot her stork.

"Don't let the fellow go for a minute," he said. "Do you mind turning him over to me?"

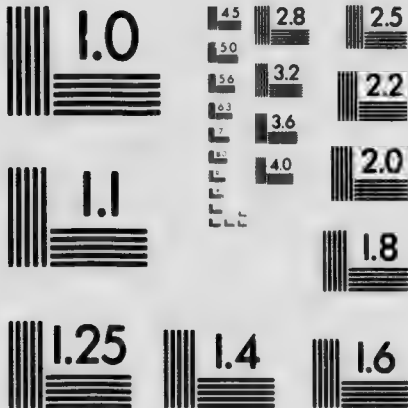
What a Political Officer could possibly want with the Kurd was beyond the Officer's ken, but he acquiesced at once. "You are the prisoner of the hakim el siyasi," he said in Arabic to the captive.

The Kurd straightened as he recognised in the dark the limping step of the Political Officer. He had a



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sneaking respect not unmixed with fear for "El Araj" amounting indeed almost to a superstitious awe. Galt held his automatic, its barrel glinted as he flashed his torch in the Kurd's face.

"Where is the daughter of Musa?" he asked sternly.

Akbar started. How could the hakim know? But assuredly it was true what people said. The hakim was wise beyond all other men.

"She did that," said the hakim sharply. "Where is she hid?" The light glanced menacingly from the automatic.

"She is gone, Wallah, I know not where. I guarded her there in a tent. Not for myself, O great hakim. There are women of my people in the hills. They are women—not wild cats. It was the command of the Scorpion. She will be his wife though she likes it not. So I guarded her with the woman Fatimah. The rifles frightened my horse. It ran into the millet. I went to catch it but could not. When I returned, fearing the sheikh's anger, they were gone those two, I know not where." Again he waved his arm towards the north. "By Allah of my people, I speak the truth."

The Mussulman may frequently be an accomplished liar, but he is usually devout, and if he swears "By Allah" it is quite probable that he is telling the truth. The fellow's expression in the flashlight looked genuine enough. Galt slowly mounted his horse and rode after the others, while Akbar, much relieved, disappeared into the gloom. Neither

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guessed that just a short way off a white faced, golden haired child crouched in the millet, waiting silence to fall on the desert.

XIX

A RETURN

BLESSED is the post! At least it's blessed when it brings you something, though it is of course an inefficient ramshackle bit of machinery, when it doesn't. In the desert it is as a breath of cool air, or a drink of sparkling water,—when it brings you something. The enamel of Falconer's dignity was in grave danger of disintegration.

"Free," he almost shouted. "Free! I'm going to be out of this cursed hole, back to the battalion." He was going to leave this squalid, abominable little desert town of pestiferous Arabs. The fatigue of the restless night rested lightly, and he whistled an old music hall air as he went to his room.

The post contained letters from England, and one of these was addressed to Galt. The sight of the round flowing hand would ordinarily have caused an organ in his bosom to accelerate its speed slightly.

He was in need of some braecer to rouse his spirits. The long night ride had raised a sleeping devil in his fractured limb. He felt tired and out of sorts. Of course this was a fine thing for old Falconer, but Galt was human enough to envy him profoundly

and to curse the adverse fate that condemned him still to this plague spot. He would miss Falconer. Alone in this hole. It was a hole to him now. The romance of his work was forgotten. He would quite willingly at this moment have given up everything. Confound it! He couldn't get the sordid abduction out of his mind. It was really no affair of his, he told himself, but he could not free his thoughts of it. It was just as if some rancid, heavy, suffocating air had blown from the desert into his nostrils. The love of the ancient saiyid and his daughter had been like a beautiful pastoral. It seemed to him as if a fresh tender blossom had been crushed under the heels of the profligate sheikh. And he felt as if the hakim el siyasi, the friend of the Arab, had been in some way to blame, as if he should in some way have prevented the outrage. Already he had issued orders to his shebanas for pursuit, but well he knew that it was foreordained to failure. They would no doubt bring back many of her sheep,—the Arabs could not have taken them with them,—but the girl herself was gone probably for ever.

He would never forget, he knew, the sight that had met his eyes two hours before, when in the glimmer of dawn he had come back to the town. In the ruins he had seen the ancient saiyid. The old fellow was a pitiable figure. He had been walking about the ruins all night calling upon his lost Uyuni. He looked haggard in the growing light. It had wrung Galt's heart to tell him the truth. He had listened in stony silence, the calm of the Muslim slowly wrapping him about. His head bowed slowly

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and he placed his hands on his heart. He seemed to have forgotten Galt's existence.

"Maktub, it is written," he said solemnly.

Galt was annoyed at the man's quiet acceptance of the outrage, but his anger died as he watched the old fellow, with head bowed move slowly into the heart of the ruins, a broken man. He was going to the cave of the Mahdi to pray.

Galt limped up the courtyard steps to his room, and closed the door, shutting out the dusty air of the town. There seated before a table on which stood a girl's photo, he would read his letter. He would leave for a time this land of dust and violence, and live again in a little shady corner of Surrey that he knew so well.

He picked up the photo and looked at it closely. Her eyes were the eyes of a child. He had never noticed it so clearly before. How true the likeness was to life. She was living there before him in her rose leaf daintiness. He fancied he could see the perfect blending of pink and white in her matchless complexion, and on her lips was poised like a butterfly's wing that light lilting gossamer laughter. That laughter had played all sorts of tunes on his heart strings. They had never been and never could be comrades. He had sought vainly for some common ground on which their spirits could enter into communion. He was conscious of this lack even when he advanced a certain important interrogation to which with her intoxicating lilting laugh she had given an affirmative reply. Her beauty and that elfin laugh had forged his chains. It had been so

light that laugh, so like the rustling of leaves. He had sworn a mighty oath that he must shield that laugh from the blighting winds of the world. He had been filled with the pride of protection. What if it had been she up there now in the north in the hands of the sheikh? He sat down with a frown and opened the letter. He would forget the present and be transported to the quiet little groves and valleys of Surrey.

The pleasure of anticipation faded. There was a passing reference to his protracted sojourn in Africa. Poor dear, it must be dreadfully hot. He had often spoken of the desert in his letters. It must, she felt sure, be the Sahara. Was El Ragi near Timbuctoo? She couldn't understand his last letter at all. She was afraid she was fearfully stupid, but why should he bother his head over the negroes? Couldn't they be left alone? She did hope they were not cannibals. And then she unburdened herself of a very tearful tale. Blanco was dead! Of course he remembered dear old Blanco. She was quite certain she would never recover perfectly from the shock. A dreadful motor,—she simply couldn't write it down, and the horrid man had the audacity to say that Blanco had run out in front of his motor, and he had jammed on the brakes. She was sure he hadn't. She was quite sure he wanted to kill Blanco—the brute. There should be a law to punish such men most severely. When he came home—couldn't he come home quite soon because this really was serious? Poor helpless dogs must be protected. He simply must see the Prime Minister or whoever was the right person,

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and make him pass such a law. Dear, oh dear! If it weren't for the sympathy of such and such a person she didn't know what she would do. He was so kind and after the immemorial methods of ladies she quietly and unobtrusively injected the "other man" to sow the seed of distrust in the heart of the too confident male.

Galt laid the letter down unfinished. He was irritated. He was not stung with jealousy; he was simply not in a mood to understand the lady's grievances. In face of the elemental desert tragedy, the fate of Blanco, from which she thought she would never wholly recover, was grotesque and displeasing. He went down to breakfast.

The hakim ate alone in moody silence. The Military Governor was still asleep. After the strenuous night he had given word that he must not be disturbed till noon. In the midst of breakfast Galt looked up impatiently. A boy had appeared in the door. There was an Arab girl who wished to see the hakim el siyasi. The boy was told sharply that this was the billet of the Military Governor. He would see the girl at his office, but on a sudden thought he leaped to his feet, and positively ran past the astonished youth. Unhelmeted he stood blinking in the courtyard.

"My Eyes. Is it really you, My Eyes?"

Though a veil as usual covered her face, who could have doubted the identity of that slim figure, and those small brown ankleted bare feet? She knelt and touched the ground with her forehead.

"Allah the All Merciful . . ." But the hakim cut her short.

"Come in at once, My Eyes. Come in. Boy, bring some cushions. Sit down, My Eyes."

Galt was delighted. The girl had returned. The sheikh had been beaten. He would not allow himself to think of the harm she might have suffered at his hands. She had been reunited with her old father. The trend of their lives would be resumed. Again he would see them threading their way through the suq and would hear her call out "Balak, Saiyid Musa," ("Get out of the way for Saiyid Musa"). He was pleased for the girl's own sake. For the time she was really to him, not an Arab or a Muslim. She was a friend who had escaped from a great danger. It might have been an English girl who was sitting before him. It did not seem strange that she had come to him.

She seemed to be under stress of some emotion. Most natural; after what she had come through. It was wonderful she had stood her trials so well. He sought to put her at her ease. She must have some breakfast. Of course she would. She must be very hungry. Perhaps she would not care for his sort of breakfast. The boy would bring her some dates and rice. She drew aside her veil. She was pale and the violet eyes were tired. His face wore a kindly smile as she ignored the implements, which Muhammad would not employ, and ate with the frankness of a famished young animal. He would have thought it impossible, but she ate, Galt decided, with an inherent grace and daintiness.

When she had finished and had washed her carmined fingers in a bowl of water, he urged her to tell how she had escaped from the sheikh. She spoke stumbingly at first, embarrassed before the great hakim, but soon she seemed to lose herself. Her voice was deeply musical. The guttural Arabic could be impressive, but only from her lips was it actually musical. Even the ghain, (that preposterously guttural sound), seemed like a contralto note, but it was not the sort of music to which he was accustomed. It belonged to unknown barbaric instruments. Galt was possessed for a moment of a strange fancy. In the child's accents he was listening to the voice of the desert, not the expanse of dust and death, but the æon old, mist enshrouded realm of mystery, passionate love, fierce intrigue and war and endless drowsing summer.

In silence he watched the play of uncurbed emotion on her face, now deeply flushing her cheek, now leaving it alabaster white. She was a true child of nature. She had not yet learnt the Arab's art of repression. Could a Millais or a Rembrandt, he wondered, ever have done justice on canvas to those eyes? He had never seen any others half so vivid. They actually changed hue with her moods. Now they were the sapphire of an unclouded mid-day sky, and now a dark violet. She wept wrathful tears over her lost sheep. They were gone, the flocks that were the means of sustaining the saiyyid, her father's life. He was a teacher as the hakim knew, who preached the Koran for less price than the suq water carrier, to a race of pigs and jackals. But the tears, which

the recounting of her own misfortunes did not raise, were quickly dried when she learned that Shebanas were now at the millet rounding up her sheep, and that unquestionably many of them would be returned to the saiyyid before nightfall. Allah and the hakim were good. Her father would be able to live.

Galt was amused, though just a little startled, at Uyuni's drastic opinion of the sheikh. Assuredly she had cause for rather grave dislike, but he was scarcely prepared to hear from the young lady's lips that his mothers had been noseless from the time of Noah, that his fathers had been worm-eaten, plague-stricken liars and robbers, and that she hoped she would see him flayed alive and left out in the sun to bake. And she was in deadly earnest. Galt began to feel slightly uneasy, and he looked closely at Uyuni. She had been the Scorpion's captive.

With kindling anger and that growing uneasiness he heard the details of the abduction, and the captivity at the millet to the hour of the Gurkha attack. His pulse quickened when she recounted that the sheikh's step had been at the door, and that with her fingers on the sekkin hidden in her breast she waited. Then the first shot had been fired. Alhamdulillah! Despair had changed to hope. He, the stoned one, had ordered the woman Fatimah to watch her. Akbar, the Kurd, whose face she had torn, had also gone. Uyuni laughed mirthlessly and scornfully at the thought. One woman between her and the millet, just one woman. Watch her! Fatimah had just one thought, to escape from the rifles. Uyuni drew a sekkin from her bosom, "Just to

there, she felt it. Allah, how she squeaked, like a wild goose."

"Did you kill her?" asked Galt, aghast at the callousness of the young barbarian, but secretly well pleased.

"Nay, effendi. Hadst thou seen her run, thou wouldst have marvelled. It was needed," she said gravely. "Had she returned to the Scorpion unhurt without me, he would have lashed her until she died. Now he will see that she fought. Then I fled also to the millet and lay flat, for I liked not the flashes in the dark."

He forgot the woman Fatimah, but the uneasiness persisted. He leaned forward and gazed long into the violet depths of her eyes. Slowly a satisfying glow began to steal through his veins. My Eyes had returned unscathed to her father.

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XX

DON QUIXOTE

"How overjoyed your father must have been Uyuni," said the hakim.

"Great will be his joy, effendi," returned the girl simply.

"Will be? Will be?, My Eyes! You mean to tell me that you have not yet seen him, that he doesn't know. Farash! Go and find Saiyid Musa, and bring him here at once. Drag him here if his blindness prevents him coming fast—though I warrant he will come on wings. Tell him his daughter has returned safely." He turned to the girl severely, "What do you mean by letting him suffer? All night he wandered about the ruined city calling for you. Poor old . . ." But Galt paused, he saw tears spring to the girl's eyes, which she at once lowered. For the first time he fully realised how strange it was that she should be here.

"Child," he said gently, "why did you come here? Why did you not go first to your father?"

She raised her eyes to him, and stood up. She seemed to be labouring under some emotion. Her face was pale, a little shiver shook her, but her eyes

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did not falter. Deliberately, yet with fingers that seemed to tremble, she drew back the hood from her head, letting the golden millet waves fall about her shoulders. Wonderingly, uncomprehending, without speaking he watched her. With a proud humility she knelt at his feet, bending low till those glorious waves touched the floor. Then with natural dignity she again stood before him.

"I have come to be thy slave, sahib," she said.

Galt received the shock of an electric battery. He looked at her in utter amazement. He checked a momentary almost uncontrollable desire to laugh. A slave! She was joking,—but who could laugh looking at that beautiful child who was in such deadly earnest? It would have been an unpardonable affront. A slave? She simply couldn't mean it. He knew the conditions of these poor unfortunates in Islam society. It was a status recognised by the Holy Writ, but a hateful one in which the woman was without the dignity of wifehood. He was conscious of an empty feeling somewhere. He was bitterly disillusioned. It was as if he had cut open a beautiful apple and found a worm curled in the core.

But what could he expect? he asked himself. She had been raised from babyhood in the tenets of this faith. Western codes of morality were unknown to her. Quite probably in the ordinary acceptance of the term she knew no modesty at all.

Yet her free soul had rebelled against subjection to the sheikh. And now she certainly was not making her request, (or was it a demand?) lightly. Her

cheek was blanched, and though her eyes were steadfast, she was trembling. Perhaps some better impulses, embryonic and chaotic, were struggling against her appalling purpose. Lightly? It suddenly dawned on him what her position as his slave must be among her people. She was a Muslim, he an unbeliever. For her to be so yoked to him would be an atrocious sin in their eyes. And this of course she knew. She would be ostracised. They might even stone her to death. He had done her a great injustice. But still the question remained unanswered. Why? Why?

"Child," he said quietly, his hand on her shoulder, "you don't know what you are saying. What put such an impossible idea into your mind? Tell me, Uyuni?"

With his kindness her bolstered courage suddenly left her. She choked, and throwing herself on the ground, burst into rending sobs, poor little wild thing with its soul in torment. Still uncomprehending and uncomfortable, he tried awkwardly to comfort her. Gradually her weeping subsided, and by repeated coaxing, she unburdened her secret. From her broken speech he pieced together the truth. She dreaded the sheikh. She was free from him now, for the moment, but she was dogged by fear, as if a djinn were on her path. There was a superstitious nature to the fear which Galt could not quite grasp and which the girl could not explain. But assuredly it was real. He was the sheikh. As certainly as at that moment they could hear the bellowing of an angry camel in the street, he would come again for

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her. And this time the Scorpion would see that she did not escape. In her dejection, as she spoke, she would have been a model for a picture of Kismet. How could her father, who was blind, guard her from the great sheikh? She had thought and thought as she lay hidden in the millet. She could flee to the desert and die there or fall into the hands of hill Arabs. There was no other course. But tired, she slept, and in her dream she saw the way. The great hakim of the English alone could save her.

"Wa ana hina, (and I am here)," she ended simply.

As she spoke, she sat up, dried her swimming eyes, and looked into the face of the hakim above her. She saw his expression gradually change, and in her heart the flower of hope budded again. Galt indeed knew she was speaking the truth. Her fears were not unfounded. The sheikh, though now in exile, had been the overlord of his tribe, and had wielded immense power. That power in part persisted. His agents thronged the town, and in the midst of the people he was still the patriarchal ruler. Even if the sheikh did not attempt to come himself for her, a plan could easily be arranged in the gahwas to send her back to his arms. And he, thought the hakim, would be helpless. He would not know until she had gone. The girl's keen, desert trained mind realised that only in the hakim's house would she be safe.

Galt was a lonely man, exiled in the heart of an alien land. His one friend, the Military Governor, was leaving him. Who will blame him, when he

looked down on the girl's beauty and when he thought of the coils of this loathed serpent closing about her, if for a moment he entertained the possibility of taking what was offered? She had come to him. Morality meant nothing to her. He would guard her. Guard her? The girl saw the light die in his eyes and wondered.

"Child," he said brusquely, "Uyuni, what you ask is absolutely impossible."

The round eyes widened. O Mother Eve! He had hesitated. Why, there could be but one reason. She was the eternal feminine scorned. She rose.

"Am I not fair?" she asked.

Poor child! Galt pitied her. What a commentary on this land of burnt passion, where man ruled and woman was his plaything.

He took her hand tenderly.

"My Eyes. You are beautiful, most wonderfully beautiful. You are like a rose that grows in my garden in Angleterra. But this is wrong. You do not understand. Very wrong." He felt the hand tremble, and the eyes were lowered. When they were raised he was conscious of a soft glowing fire in their violet depths. He could not understand the varying moods of this desert child, but he was vaguely disturbed, and for the moment tongue-tied.

"My Eyes," he said lamely, seeking to comfort, "some day you will marry a good man, who will protect you from the sheikh."

To his surprise she snatched her hand from him.

There was a shuffling heard on the stairs. A light

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scraping of hands along the wall and a tall stooped form stood on the threshold. The night of anxiety had made a change in the saiyyid. His zubun was torn and dirty, and his blue turban was awry, but these were only superficial marks of his trials. He had aged. His stoop was more pronounced ; his face was grey, and the lines about the mouth and sunken eyes were deeper. Those sightless eyes seemed now to be striving to pierce the impenetrable fog. A light fell upon his face, for the girl had given a little soft cry of welcome. She was actually there. The messenger had not lied.

He folded his hands on his breast and raised his face, standing like the statue of a Mediaeval ascetic. It was typical of this Muslim, raised in the shadow of the mosque, that he did not now approach the girl, but turning his face towards what he deemed was the west,—and he did not go far astray,—he mumbled a prayer of thanksgiving to Allah the All Merciful.

Then his groping hands were on her shoulders. He sought to make certain that she was really restored to him. He seemed not to notice that the hakim was in the room. Galt turned away. It was a sacred thing this meeting of father and daughter. They had been separated but a few hours, but who could tell what anguish the old man had endured ? He was welcoming her as from the dead. But the Muslim in the saiyyid rose to the surface when his hands rested upon her bared face and uncovered head.

“ What is this ? ” he asked sharply. “ Where is

thy veil? Is not the hakim here? Art thou not in the presence of a stranger?"

They spoke in low earnest tones together.

"An evil thought," the saiyyid's voice was stern. "Allah forgive thee."

"Wouldst thou have me the sheikh's bride?" Oh, those seductive tones, that would have melted a heart of brass. Galt moved further away. He did not wish to intrude on the two. She was speaking low now, but Galt could see that she was describing her captivity. He had a faint suspicion that she was adding to the horrors of it. And now she was pleading. Could it be possible that she was actually trying to get her father to intercede for her? It was preposterous. The saiyyid was sternly cold.

"By Allah," the girl cried in watery rebellion, "I see thou wouldst give me back to the sheikh."

The saiyyid's head drooped slowly.

"It may be the will of Allah."

"What a beastly shame," thought Galt. "What a detestable country this is." The saiyyid's helplessness was pitiful. He seemed to see the serpent coiling about the fair little figure. Then the resolution flashed on him. It was quixotic—foolish—impossible, but somehow it stuck.

"I will take Uyuni," the hakim announced.

The saiyyid raised an arm and seemed to tower.

"Impious, accursed man, I thought thee kind. Unbeliever, knowst thou not our laws? Come, My Eyes."

"I will take her," said the hakim, "not as my slave. I give you my word as the hakim el siyasi

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of El Ragi. She will be simply a guest in my house. You cannot protect her from the sheikh. She will live under my roof and under my protection until all danger from the scorpion is removed. Then she will return to you."

With a little cry of joy Uyuni dropped on her knees and kissed the hakim's hand.

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XXI

A WARNING

"ALLAH give thee peace, effendi," said the o'd Arab solemnly. It was a benediction. Yet Galt saw that he was perplexed and troubled.

"She will be safe in my hands, saiyid," he assured the father. "She will have secluded quarters and I will see that she is comfortable. She will live entirely to herself. You might send a woman of your household to live with her if you like. I have already given my word she will not be molested."

"Yea, jinabek, thou hast given thy word, it is enough," but the perplexed, anxious look persisted.

"She will still be with you daily. She will be your guide to the Mosque, though she must of course be careful. She must not take her flocks into the desert, and from dusk till dawn every day she must be within these walls. Is that clear?"

"Yea, effendi, but . . ."

"Do you want the sheikh to have your daughter?" asked the hakim sharply.

"Allah forbid," returned the old man. "There was a time, sahib, when I thought perhaps it were well, but My Eyes would not assent. He sought to

take her by force." The voice was stern and cold, "Never will he have her now, Sahib, Alhamdulillah."

"Can you protect her?"

The saiyid put his hand to his eyes.

"I am blind, jinabek. It is through thee she will be safe. And yet . . ."

"Speak freely," said the hakim.

"Thou art a Nasrani. Thou art an Infidel. Thou believest in Isa, the Son of Mary, the daughter of Imram, a great prophet, effendi. But the great Apostle of Allah thou dost not know, nor his word." He laid his great dark withered hand on his daughter's fair head. "Uyuni is a Muslim. I have taught her the faith of the Well Hidden Table. Wilt thou swear on the Koran, nay on thy book, that thou wilt not seek to teach her thy faith, O hakim of the English?"

The saiyid spoke with great dignity.

Galt was surprised and rather amused. At the same time he experienced a shadow of regret which every Westerner must feel when he comes in contact with the religious zeal of the East. Galt's religion, if he had any, was hereditary and passive. There was nothing evangelical about it.

"If that is all that is troubling you, rid your mind of all doubts at once," he said. "I will not attempt to turn My Eyes from her faith."

"Thou wilt swear on thy book?" the saiyid inquired anxiously. The old fellow had been willing to accept Galt's word unreservedly on what appeared to the Westerner the much more important question

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of this girl's safety, and yet now he insisted on the oath. It was strange.

"Yes," Galt acquiesced, "I will send for the Book at once—if there is one. Yes, I remember, there is. I will swear on it. That will satisfy you?"

"Yea, O wise and kind hakim," and again he called down the blessings of Allah on Uyuni's benefactor's head, "And yet I fear no good will come of this to thee, O hakim."

Galt smiled. "I don't exactly see where I can be harmed."

"This is a Muslim land, effendi," said the old saiyid solemnly, and Galt had reason to remember the old Arab's words.

Warning that night came from another source. Galt and the Governor were eating their last dinner together. Neither officer was in particularly high spirits, though each it would seem had ample reason to be. Falconer was leaving a work he execrated and was again joining his battalion with the hope of future active service. Galt's work had been broadened, he had learned that no successor would be appointed to Falconer, and that his duties would now include those previously performed by the Military Governor. It was a feather in his cap. The letter from H.Q. informing him of the arrangement had paid a guarded tribute to his work as political officer, that had made him smile and yet had warmed his heart. And very decidedly was he pleased over the event of the morning. The girl had come back; she was restored to her father and now through his heart flowed a slow current of satisfaction. He was

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going to defeat a very special design of the old Scorpion. Would the child ever go back to the bloodthirsty Lothario of a sheikh? Arab or no Arab, Muslim or no Muslim,—not while he was Political Officer of El Ragi. But throughout the dinner both men were rather quiet. It suddenly occurred to each of them that he would miss the other's company. In their exile they had become friends. Even Falconer's pleasure at his good fortune was subdued.

"Devilish hard luck for you, Galt, having to still keep your tent pitched among these vermin," Falconer said. "But you incomprehensible fellow, you seem to like it." He took his monocle from his eye and wiped it; then replaced it and looked across at Galt. The quizzical look in his eye Galt did not understand. "Yes . . . incomprehensible fellow. . . . Not a sign . . . never gave you credit for quite that amount of . . ."

"What?" asked Galt nonplussed.

"Nothing," returned the Military Governor veering off. "This is a compliment to you, Galt, a decided compliment. I mean putting the whole thing in your hands like this. H.Q. has decided you're the man for the job, and quite rightly."

Galt smiled. H.Q. was no more chary of praise than Falconer. Scarcely a day had passed that he had not criticized Galt's methods.

"There have been times when I have thought that you mixed a little too freely with the Arabs. But I was wrong. Results count. 'You have delivered the goods,' as the Yankees say. H.Q. recognises

it. It would be a pity to destroy this fine fabric you have constructed, Galt, a great pity."

"What do you mean by destroying?" Galt asked.

Falconer gazed at him keenly.

"By George," he said with a touch of admiration, "not a sign."

Galt was mystified.

"After all," said Falconer quietly, "I don't believe somehow that things are going to be so very dull for you here."

"I shall miss the battering ram of that eyeglass of yours. You seem to be trying to bore right through me. Still . . . yes . . . The work is interesting, though I don't think you've ever been able quite to get my point of view. We're differently constituted. There is something actually fascinating about this work to me."

"Ah," commented the Major dryly, then his lips parted with a smile, "Fascinating, humph! But I say, don't you really think this just a bit—open? Of course the place will be infernally lonely and all that, and I don't know that I altogether blame you. I probably might do exactly the same thing myself, but have you thought of the possible consequences?"

The slight embarrassment of the Major, so unusual in him, was illuminating.

"I take it," said Galt suppressing his amusement, "you refer to my guest, the daughter of the Saiyid Musa."

The monocle dropped from his eye and was quietly replaced.

"Guest?"

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The suggestion of a choke in the Major's voice was too much for Galt. He laughed spontaneously.

"You are a cool customer," said Falconer.

"I'm sorry," Galt explained more soberly. "It must seem rather strange to you. I intended to tell you about it. You rather forestalled me." Then in detail he recounted the event of the morning, omitting only the girl's request that she come to him as his slave. He did not like to think what Falconer's opinion of the girl's wish would be. He would not understand. He had never tried to study the people among whom he lived, and now that she had come under his protection Galt wished to save her from humiliating remarks.

"I couldn't let him take her again, the old scoundrel. Poor little thing. It wouldn't be human."

Falconer listened silently, and his brow knit.

"It is very decent of you, Galt; another man I mightn't believe. You'll have to forgive me. For a time I thought this thing might have been planned—just waiting you know till I got away to bring her in, and then I thought it rather galling to install her before I had even left the town. But I know you, Galt. I believe you. You're a good hearted quixotic—ass." The monocle glared almost belligerently. The political officer's broad good humoured face beamed.

"H.Q. may hear of it. This isn't Patagonia you know, though the Lord knows it's a God-forsaken enough spot. It's almost certain to get to the ears of H.Q., and naturally they'll misinterpret, and why

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shouldn't they? It isn't usual for a man living alone to bring into his home a young woman—as his guest. It isn't done, even in the desert. Of course I know there might have to be explanations, but they can be made—satisfactorily.

"But what about the people here? Deuced queer lot these Muslims, intensely jealous of their women. They looked as if they'd chew my head off when I watched their veiled females drawing water in their jars from the river. You're courting a knife in your ribs, Galt,—for a whim."

"There may of course be a little trouble," said Galt quietly and thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid the work you've done will be destroyed."

"No," he said, "this is part of my work I must help the Arabs, and she is one of them. I must protect her from this brutal injustice."

"I can't understand you putting your neck into a noose for the sake of this Arab brat," returned the Military Governor.

"Brat," cried Galt. His eye hardened then assumed a humorous glint. "Her hair is spun gold. Her eyes are as blue . . ."

"Confound it, man, why this rhapsody? She's an Arab. Are you,—enamoured of the lady?"

Galt laughed and Falconer in a moment joined.

There was a faint tinkling sound from the stairway, and in a moment instinctively both officers were on their feet. It was a vision that appeared to them in the lamp's dim light. The Military Governor drew a long breath. "Brat," he said softly, "by

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George, I never imagined, spun gold!" She was a haunting picture, an Arabian Night's dream, from her small brown ankleted feet to that spun gold glory. But it was the soft glow that radiated from the violet eyes that gave the unusual, elusive charm. Falconer coughed and adjusted his monocle. Galt was frankly smiling in welcome at the girl, and now turned triumphantly to Falconer.

"Hang the fellow," thought the Military Governor, "he doesn't—see."

The look that the girl gave the political officer was a direct outpouring of her soul. As far as she was concerned the Military Governor might as well not have existed.

"Salaam, effendi," she said, then kneeling she touched the floor with her head.

"What is it, child?" asked Galt. "Is anything wrong?"

"Nay, effendi," said the girl, "I come to bid thee good night." Quietly she glided off and the tinkle of her anklets drew away.

"Well," said Galt, "what do you think of my guest?" He was proud of his protégé. Falconer looked closely at his friend. There was not the shadow of deceit or embarrassment in the frank, open countenance. It was perhaps his natural modesty that had prevented him from seeing that look in the girl's eyes, but certainly he had not seen it. But when the time should come, when he would see, what then? Falconer wiped his monocle.

"Why ask?" he said, "the answer is obvious. She's a beauty and an Arab. It seems incredible.

Let me give you one little piece of advice if you're not too hidebound in your obstinacy to listen. There's a photo in your room. You've told me it's the girl who'll some day bear your name. I wouldn't if I were you say anything about her in your letters. Oh, no, no,—I have no suspicions. I understand the present situation (slightly emphasizing the 'present'). But women are strange creatures, you know. She might not understand."

"On the contrary," returned Galt frankly, "I think it only fair that she should have full particulars."

"Oh, very well," said Falconer.

Later in his room Galt composed a long epistle to the girl of the photo. He experienced quite a little inward pleasure in the composition. "Thinks I'd better not say anything about her to you," he laughed, addressing the girl's photo, "thinks you'd be jealous." It would amuse the girl to know that among the African negroes there was such a person as Uyuni. He described the Arab child's beauty in glowing terms, and as he ended with, "Her rooms are across the courtyard. No doubt she has offered up prayers to Allah, and gone to sleep, for her light has gone out," he smiled with satisfaction. "Thinks you'd be jealous, that you won't understand," he said again. He picked up the photo and looked long and critically at it; the contented smile gradually disappeared. The lamplight seemed to play him a trick. It had probably simply been a deepening of a shadow, or more likely simply his imagination, but for a single instant the gossamer web of laughter

had fled from the girl's lips, and he looked into the eyes of a petulant spoiled child. The sight brought up the unpleasant recollection of a quarrel over a trifle, a full week's glacial coldness over nothing. It had been the fault of course of her sheltered pampered life. Then it struck him forcibly how vastly different was that existence in its cool aloofness to the passionate life of the desert. Critically and frowningly he re-read his letter. In his endeavour to show how nonplussed Falconer had been at the appearance of the girl, he had been a little too ardent, yes, too ardent, in his description of her beauty. There was too intimate a touch in the whole business. "I wonder if she would understand it," he said slowly, and tore the letter into fragments. "All that work for nothing," he said with a sigh. "Will write another soon without too much of the girl in it," and he prepared himself for bed.

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XXII

THE JOURNAL

GALT was fully aware that this act of philanthropy might easily lead to disagreeable complications. It had not needed the Military Governor's warning to make that clear. He had no misgivings about his relations with his own department. They might hear of, and temporarily misinterpret his action, but with an explanation all would be well. It was in El Ragi itself that the danger lay. The longer Galt thought over the matter the clearer it became. The Arab, as Galt well knew, had a natural, deep-seated dislike of any infringement of what he considered his personal liberty. The one redeeming feature in the Turks' rule, in the mind of the Arab, was his easy going policy of non-interference with the Arabs' household. In his home the Arab was king. His house indeed might be an abomination to the eyes and nostrils of men, but he was allowed to exist in his blissful squalor without a word of protest from the Government. The health and sanitary laws imposed by the British were irksome. But here was something much worse. The Arabs would think that the English hakim had stolen the wife of the

sheikh. Whatever they thought of the Scorpion, the nomad patriarchs, and town merchants would be very indignant. They would feel that an intolerable unthought of wrong had been done their leader. The girl's own wishes,—since she was a woman,—would not be a matter worthy of consideration. Galt felt that it was quite possible his own influence with the people might be gravely undermined, and the thought brought some discomfort. He did not wish to see his work harmed. He loved his work. He did not however falter in his resolution to protect the girl, and he was even strengthened in his determination to defeat the sheikh's designs, when he found that strange little book in the bazaar, with its story of ancient wrongs.

The book was of the sere and yellow variety, weather beaten, dog eared, mouldy. In many places the writing was quite illegible. It looked as ancient for all the world thought Galt, as the cuneiform tables found in the Nimrod mound at Nineveh. And yet it bore the date 1903. Galt bought it one morning in a bookseller's stall in the suq. More in jest than earnest he had asked the Arab if he had any English books, and was quite prepared for his immediate answer. He had good books, not English, no, because as the hakim knew he had small call for anything in that language, but there were many fine books in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. Would not the hakim like this dictionary? It gave the Turkish and Persian equivalent for the English word. It was a fine dictionary, wallah, it was good, from Baghdad, and he ran his thumb across the leaves.

The hakim had no need? Ah, but yes, why had he not thought of it before? There was a book in English though he feared the hakim would not like it. It was very old and soiled and he dug into a dusty heap in the back of his dukkan, finally placing in the hakim's hand the dilapidated volume. The saiyid could see it had a very sorry appearance. If he really wanted it, it would be a gift "Baksheesh" to the hakim el siyasi. Or perhaps the hakim would wish to give him what he had paid the goatherd for it, only a kran. Yes, a goatherd had found it on the desert while he drove his flocks to pasture. That of course accounted for the book's condition. It had lain for years, ah, many years in the desert at the Tomb of the Emperor. A rupee? "Muta-shekker, sahib."

It was a diary. Galt's curiosity had first been aroused by the name he had seen on the flyleaf, "Charles Thurston." It was a fairly unusual name, and somehow it struck a chord in his memory. He fancied he remembered. When he reached his rooms he looked in "The Arab Empire" which he had recently read. Yes, there was the name. Thurston had been a lesser luminary in the firmament of archæology, a delver in the ruins of Mesopotamia. He had not been a Lazard, but had been a man of promise, who had written two or three valuable books, and had sent many relics to the British Museum. The reference to the archæologist ended with a few words of regret. Thurston had disappeared. Where, no man knew. Most probably he had fallen victim to lawless Arabs, who notoriously

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objected to the excavation of ruins. Galt was intrigued by the mystery. Archæologists would value this diary. He would send it to G.H.Q. for transmission to the British Museum. Perhaps, too, the diary might give him some clue to the cause of the man's disappearance. Thurston probably had relatives in England who would be interested.

The notebook proved not particularly exhilarating. It was almost indecipherable. Many pages were entirely obliterated. What he could read told of the archæologist's hopes, disappointments and triumphs. Over a piece of pottery which his spade unearthed he would build a fanciful story. Columbus or Captain Cook could not have been more enthusiastic over their discovery of new lands than this man over an old weapon or fragment of glass.

A paragraph struck Galt's eye. It was the last entry in the notebook. He re-read it.

"It is always well to be on good terms with the local potentate. The sheikh is lord of all he surveys, and can help or retard your work tremendously. I called yesterday on the young Sheikh of El Ragi. He is a handsome chap, of haughty bearing, straight and thin as a pikestaff, a true desert king. He received me cordially and promised his aid, professing keen interest in my endeavours. But somehow I mistrust the fellow. I don't know why, unless it is that his eye seems to one crafty, resourceful, cruel. He is called the Scorpion, I don't know how he acquired the name, but it seems to me to have a sinister significance. To-day the fellow called on me. He has just gone from my camp. Confound

the rascal, I know I'll have trouble with him. Of course he was pleasant, excessively pleasant." And then the true cause of the archæologist's misgivings became manifest. "He has a decided proclivity I am told for the fair sex. They say he has a large harim. The way this gay Lothario looked at my wife tempted me to shoot him where he stood. She was adorably sweet and gracious, just as she always is, and of course unveiled. She wants to live her life here just as she did in England. Confound the fellow, I don't know what I would do without my family but I was a doubly qualified fool to bring them with me to this country."

Galt laid aside the book. He rose and walked slowly out on the roof of his house. It was growing dusk, from one side came the lessening murmur of the bazaar. The sound seemed very far off, like the beating of waves on an alien shore. Galt's thoughts had flown back over the years since the archæologist's last words were penned. He felt somehow certain that they had been his last written words. His heart went out to his countryman across whose life the sinister shadow of the Scorpion had fallen. It was the same Scorpion—never for a moment did he doubt it—older now, and heavier in body, but ever the true prototype of the desert insect from which he derived his name. Never for an instant also did it occur to him to doubt that the sheikh had been in a way connected with the man's misfortunes. He looked over the roofs of the houses beyond the ruins, far into the desert flats where a solitary hill stood out dim and portentous. It was here that the notebook

had been found. What tragedy hung about this tomb of the Caesars? Galt's face clouded. He was thinking of the murdered Gurkhas; he was thinking too of the "adorably sweet" woman whose beauty had caught the eye of the Scorpion, but uppermost now was the thought of the fair haired Arab child whom he had taken under his protection. She was only an Arab, and those others, the man and his wife had been from his own land, of his own race, but they were dead, and she was living. The story seemed to him like a warning. Since the girl had come under his roof three days before he had not seen or heard anything of the Scorpion. But now—how could he have thought that the sheikh might have tranquilly accepted the loss of the beautiful girl? No. Sooner or later the Scorpion would attempt to sting. He must tell his trusted shebanas to keep close watch on the fringe of the plain. He felt instinctive relief when he heard the tinkle of the girl's anklets from the batan mal hosh. She had come safely to her nest for the night.

Later that evening he learned the truth about the archæologist's fate. It had been his custom frequently in the evening to walk about among the gahwas, a practice which had aroused the Military Governor's disgust. He was out of patience with this modern Caliph business, but Galt gained much benefit from these nightly visits to the Arabs' clubs. Here the tribesman, squatting cross-legged on a bench, smoking his naghilah with its glowing coals, or drinking coffee from a tiny cup discussed freely his affairs and the affairs of his neighbours. At first

the Arabs were reticent in the hakim's presence, but in time his good humoured friendliness thawed them, and they talked openly to him. The political officer thus learned the needs of his people.

As to-night he was drawing back the heavy gate, he heard a tinkle behind him, and a soft hand was laid on his arm.

"Go not to the gahwa to-night, effendi," said the girl's voice pleadingly. He turned to her and found her visibly fearful.

"What is it, Uyuni?" he asked gently.

"I have seen Akbar, the stoned. He is here," she said.

Galt frowned. He must warn his shebanas. But directly he smiled. He did not like to see the child afraid and hastened to reassure her.

"The house is well guarded, Uyuni. Have no fear. I'll put an extra shebana, Butras, on the gate.

"away to bed." He left her standing with her protest unspoken. She stamped her little ankleted foot. How foolish even the great hakim could be. What was her safety to the great danger which was beginning to gather about the beloved one? She shivered slightly; then gently opening the gate, slipped into the night.

During the last few days, Galt's visits to the gahwa had been temporarily discontinued. His time had been fully occupied with differences between the tribes which had been difficult of settlement. Now when he entered the coffee-house a silence fell on the Arabs. Dressed as an Arab though he was, there was no mistaking even at a glance, the well-known

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limp of El Araj. All moved away from him, and looked at him with sidelong whispers. Galt did not for the moment notice the coldness in the air. He was thinking it strange that he had fancied that someone, a girl like Uyuni in size, was following him. She was of course at home in bed.

Galt seated himself on a bench beside an old merchant with whom he had frequently chatted on his nocturnal visits. They had become quite good friends, but to-night the old grizzled Muslim smoked his naghilah in portentous quiet.

"It is a grave blunder, sahib," he said at length.

"Blunder?" the hakim asked, divining the truth and a little annoyed.

"Yea, O hakim of the English, a most grievous fault. Surely thou knowest a Muslim woman may not be the slave of a Muslim much less the slave of an Unbeliever."

"See here," said Galt sharply. "She is not my slave." But the shadow of a smile in the worldly wise old eyes of the Muslim checked him. What use to protest? The old fellow would not believe. It sobered Galt to realise that this would be so with ali or nearly all the people of El Ragi.

"The hakim is strong and his arm is a guard of rock, but what will it avail him? His people the Anglez are not with him. He is hemmed about by those who will do the bidding of the Scorpion." The merchant slowly shook his head. "That," and he pointed to the dark dome of the Mosque, "is ill pleased. But will not the hakim be advised before it is too late and send the girl back?" There was

something impressive in the merchant's serious warning.

"The girl remains with me," said Galt. He was irritated though impressed with the shadow of the great masjid.

"When the Scorpion casts his eye upon a woman let no man deny him. It will go ill with him even if he be a British officer. In the end, she must be his." The old merchant spoke with finality. It was as if he said, "Maktub, it is written." Galt's anger grew. He was thinking of the words of the archæologist on whose wife in the years past this Scorpion had cast an eye.

"Even as many years ago he took the wife of the Englishman who delved in the ruins of El Ragi?" he hazarded.

The merchant took the tube of the naghilah from his lips and regarded the hakim sharply.

"Ah," he said slowly, "thou hast learnt of that—how I cannot guess. Few would dare. . . . It is well it is the hakim of the English who speaks even now. It is many years ago. It is a thing of the past like the ruins in which he delved, but there was a time when to use such words as thine were to ask for the cloaked knife in thy vitals. There was one . . . but why recall it? It is all gone and forgotten. Thy Government asked the Government at Stamboul to find out what had become of El Anglez, and for a while there was a Pasha in the town who asked questions. But who was there to answer, for eyes were watching. . . ." The merchant looked at Galt inscrutably.

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"It had happened in the night." The merchant explained vaguely. "Who were the offenders? Who could say? Wild tribes from the hills?" and again the inscrutable glance. "But why seek to hide the truth? Thou knowest. El Anglezi was a madman to come unguarded into the desert to delve among the mounds (an impious task, abhorred by Allah). Ah, and to bring such a woman. Allah had bestowed on her great beauty and charm. The foolish delver camped at night at the base of the Roman Tomb. And in the night the storm arose which killed the man." The merchant was silent for a time, puffing thoughtfully, "It is the law of the desert, O hakim mal Anglez . . . to the strongest belongs the woman as all else. Take that into thy heart, effendi, and ponder. By Allah, I would not have thee slain. What is the girl? Ah, muy yuharif, Allah be with thee if thou will not listen. The woman? She was young and knew not desert laws. Her white body was dragged from the river."

The merchant rose, it was getting late. In the moonlight the mosque clock showed the hour as ten minutes to six; almost twelve English time. Would the hakim excuse him? He had to rise early. He opened his dukkan at dawn, but the sahib seemed not to hear. He was plunged in thought. His mind was troubled with pictures of his unfortunate country people, the poor, misguided, enthusiastic archæologist with his "ill divining soul" and his wife. His lips tightened as he thought of the "white body" dragged from the water. He was proud of his

countrywoman. That sinister figure, the same after the lapse of many years, the Scorpion. And then Galt's lips parted in a smile, though his eye still had a steely glint. All the chivalry of his nature was stirred. She was not his countrywoman this other, this Arab. She was only an Arab, but she was a woman. His heart glowed. She was safe in his home. There she would remain until the cloud hanging over her had been for ever dispelled.

XXIII

IN THE CAVERNS OF EL RAGI

WHEN he had stepped into the street from the gahwa and started homeward, the tale he had heard seemed to have produced a strange effect on Galt, an effect which amused while it rather annoyed him. He actually felt slightly nervous. Why should he imagine that people were following him? Of course the way was dark, darker than usual for the moon was well hidden behind a cloud. In the narrow ill-lighted streets, once the gahwa was left behind, the high walls loomed blank and forbidding. More than ever to-night he seemed to be treading the byways of a Mediaeval town. At any moment he might see the guard with swinging lantern. Thank goodness he had his own lantern. The road was abominably rough. He must do more for the lighting of the streets. There seemed indeed to be a number of people abroad to-night, but, no doubt, like he, they were going home from gahwas.

He hesitated an instant at the opening of a lane. It was a short cut to his house, but it was decidedly dark, very narrow and cramped. On other nights

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he had passed down here without a thought, but somehow to-night his mind was full of the dark coigns and doorways which might shelter a foe. Who were those figures preceding him, slinking into the shadows? A shambling form passed knocking the rim of the light. He recognised the heavy features, crafty eyes, and stooping shoulders of Yusuf, the Jew. He greeted him coldly with "Mesak Allah Bil Kher." Why should he imagine that the fellow's usual sycophantic salutation contained an ill-concealed sneer? Something seemed certainly to be getting on his nerves to-night. It was nonsensical. Why he actually felt as if the whole town was peering at him from behind its lattices. He stepped boldly down the lane.

He stopped dead,—and swore. If not the whole town certainly two eyes had been watching him from a lattice. He could not doubt the evidence of his senses. The face had been lit for one kaleidoscopic fragment of time by the lantern gleam. It might have been the face of a ghost, so quickly it was lost in the darkness of that upper window. But there could be no doubt. He had recognised beyond question those cunning, enigmatic, sensual features of the Scorpion.

Galt swung his lantern into his left hand and grasped with his right a weapon hidden in his girdle. Before him was the dark heavy door beneath the window in which he had seen the Scorpion's face. For the moment all sign of hesitation had vanished. The man was there. Galt was shaken by anger at

the fellow's effrontery, followed by a distinct thrill of exaltation. In the morning he would be gone. To-night, now, he must be taken. But a voice of caution within him checked him before the door. This was madness. He was walking into a trap. The Scorpion had by the expression that crossed his face shown that he had not intended to reveal himself, but of course he had come with a definite purpose. Galt was possessed now with an anxiety for his ward. He must not delay—he blamed himself that he had not paid stricter attention to her fears—he must hurry on. Perhaps even now she was in danger. Perhaps. . . . He stood stock still.

The voice seemed to come from the dark void. It was low, intense. An assignation. Some woman under the cloak of darkness was whispering to her lover. The single word "Taal" (come) was repeated, and now the tone was pleading, and apparently it was directed to him. His fair charmer was evidently mistaken in his identity. Galt was amused, or perhaps—and his teeth set—it was part of the game.

"Taal, effendi."

Galt was struck with surprise. Warm wholesome anger succeeded. There was no mistaking the voice now, nor the heavily veiled figure that slipped like a wraith into the feeble gleam of the lamp.

"Come—quickly, effendi," and the girl's soft hand caught his arm above the lamp. What was My Eyes doing here? Why was she prowling about the dark streets in the night, playing with disaster?

What mad freak had brought her out when she should have been in bed? Did she not know that right above them was the sheikh? For a moment unpleasant suspicions poisoned his thoughts.

"Uyuni," he said sharply, ignoring her effort to draw him from the road. "What . . ." From somewhere in the alley where a casement had slipped open came the answer. A thin flame leapt into the night, and with it the lantern glass splintered between them.

While Galt stood momentarily dazed, Uyuni instinctively dashed the lamp from his hand to the ground, extinguishing its flickering gleam, and pulled him with her quite unbelievable strength to the side of the lane. The night crackled, hissed and spat, and the road was ripped almost at his feet. The first shot had acted as either a contemplated or involuntary signal.

"An eyelash squeak that," thought Galt, his heart pumping against his ribs. He was still angry with the girl, but he realised that it was only by her quickness of wit that they had been saved.

As they stood close together in the shelter of a doorway he was conscious of her quick alert breathing; for an instant her soft warm young body was pressed close to his side like a little animal seeking refuge, and his anger died. His pulses quickened. When they got home he would demand explanations and would bring her severely to task for running into danger. Wherever she had gone on her rambles in the dark it was lucky for him that she had come

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up with him on her way home. What instinct native to her desert bred soul had warned her of the danger lurking before him to which his eyes had been blind he could not guess. But he was grateful. He must now get her and himself out of what was certainly a very nasty corner.

He cautiously peered into the lane. They must be prepared he whispered to her to make a rush for it back into the more open roads of the town. No doubt shebanas would soon arrive on the scene. The firing would have stirred them. They would soon reach succour. He drew back hastily with a muttered oath. Moving forms already intervened. Retreat was cut. Pushing the girl behind him he prepared to make his stand. Soon their hiding place would be discovered. Should he call? It might precipitate disaster. Grimly he drew the weapon from his girdle and waited. It's six chambers would take their tally. Perhaps by then they would be rescued. If not . . . He was not alone a man fighting for his life, he was a knight errant shielding a woman. At that critical moment when he was probably separated from eternity by only a few seconds, he forgot that she was an Arab child and he the Political Officer of El Ragi. He was possessed of a peculiar idea. She was a damsel in distress and he a knight of the days of chivalry. Of course the sheikh had not known that she was abroad, or she would already have been captured; probably she had not been recognised in the lamp-light but soon it would be known that she crouched in the doorway. With what exultation they would

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attack and cut him down. His hand tightened on the automatic.

Behind him he heard a little gasp of relief and another sound. Bolts were being cautiously withdrawn and the door was swinging slowly. Some curious but cautious inmate was seeking to learn the cause of the noise in the street. Galt wedged himself into the aperture, while the hidden one taking sudden fright, strove to shut the gate. The man fled; the girl stepped through and Galt hastily banged and bolted the heavy barricade. He breathed with relief.

But the respite was only temporary. Already there were rising cries and a clatter and battering on the door. Galt distinguished the heavy voice of Akbar. "Death to the Infidel." But it was not alone from without that danger threatened. The man fleeing from the door was shouting "Harami" (thief) at the top of his lungs, and there were grumblings and mumblings from awakening sleepers in the batan mal hosh before them. It was a wide dark courtyard. From its size, the sleeping figures, and the heavy rancid odour in the air Galt recognised a caravanserai. Dim figures were hurrying about in confusion, and voices were calling "Fanus" (light), "where is the dog?" For a moment Galt thought of proclaiming himself and throwing himself and the girl on their protection. He had many friends in El Ragi. They would probably refuse to hand him over even to the sheikh. But a moment's thought showed him the folly of this. They were doubtless desert nomads who had

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come to traffic in the suq. Probably they did not know him. It was throwing too much into the lap of fate. They might save him, but it was most probable that they would deliver the girl to the sheikh. He pulled Uyuni into an alcove and on into a heavy smelling stable; there they crouched between two grunting, soliloquizing camels.

Their plight was not much improved. They had secured momentary sanctuary, but already a light was moving towards the gate. They could dimly see in the courtyard the roused sleepers watching the gate keenly, their hands on their rifles and khanjars. Galt could hear voices at the gate but could not distinguish the words; and now on the air with the fanatical zeal of the Muslim rose the cry "Death to the Infidel who scorns the law of the Prophet. Death to the Infidel, the stoned, the child of Iblis." Galt felt a chill pass through him, and instinctively he caught the girl to him. He could feel her shoulders quiver. They were not listening to the cries of human beings. The sheikh had effectively used the sharp weapon of fanaticism. The Arabs were transformed. They were becoming a crazed mob, hot on the trail of an Infidel who had outraged the divine laws, and—both the fugitives knew it now—the Muslim girl who had defied the will of Allah. Dire would be the punishment of both. He would fall to their knives, but to her would probably be reserved the crueller death—stoning. Galt's heart grew cold. For the moment he entirely forgot his own danger. His thoughts were distressed by visions of the child's

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tender limbs being battered and torn by this ghastly act ; he hated all Moslems.

"It may be death, child," he said pityingly. "Are you much afraid?"

"Nay, effendi," she replied calmly, "I am with thee."

Galt's fingers tightened on the single weapon and he grimly watched.

There he was, the sheikh, his keen-eyed cruel physiognomy illumined an instant. He looked like a bird of prey. Galt felt the girl's shoulders quiver again. She too had seen.

He heard the girl's breath catch slightly.

"What is it, child?" he asked.

"Thou didst not see?" she whispered. "The mouth of the vaults. It is there." Galt knew what she meant. Under all the older houses of El Ragi as under the ruins of the ancient city were the vaulted chambers where the Arabs lived in the torpid hours of the summer. Her keen eye had detected the opening of one of these underground caverns.

She caught his hand, then quietly stole along the stable, bending beneath the flopping necks of the recumbent camels. At the end of the stables they stopped flattening themselves against the wall.

"See," whispered Uyuni. An Arab holding a candle above his head, stood at the mouth of a dark opening in the floor of the archway. He was peering into the darkness below, and seemed on the point of descending.

"There is no need," said another standing near, "I slept at the mouth and have scarce left it. They

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are not there. Let us ransack the stables, the Infidel and the Wanton must be there," and on the new scent they departed quickly.

Someone had entered the stable. A light was approaching. There was an uproar, the camels were objecting with subterranean grumblings to the flame in their eyes.

"Now," said Galt.

They had to pass along the open archway for about thirty feet. They might make the distance undiscovered. The way was covered with a heavy cloak of darkness now. It was lucky he was dressed as an Arab. He might be mistaken for one of the others. Holding the girl close to his side against the wall, he strode out, striving to hide his limp. They had almost reached the mouth when someone shouted and a keen hunting cry arose. They broke into a run and dashed through the vault's mouth.

Down a stair in pitch darkness they rushed, Galt stumbling and needing to be guided, the girl lightly, her keen eyes piercing the opaque air. For a moment at the foot they stopped to get their bearings. They were in one of the long arched, catacomb cellars of El Ragi, built centuries before. The vault was musty as if it had been sealed for all those years. The floor was littered with refuse; rats rushed from their feet, and in the air above was the whirr of bats' wings. With their hands feeling the wall they started. There was no time to lose, already there were voices at the vault's opening, and a tiny gleam filtered through the air into the cavern.

Swiftly and noiselessly they moved. The cavern

branched. They plunged down one of its avenues. Through an ancient airshaft above their heads they caught a glimpse of the stars. Many lanes, and vaulted dwelling rooms broke away from the path they followed. Galt's spirits rose. They could lose themselves. Behind them now were the echoing cries and the distant flashing lights of the Arabs; the keen searching faces and white robes were visible now and then at the intersection of caverns. But the cries were becoming fainter and were dying away in the labyrinth of subterranean byways.

The darkness was intense. Galt's groping hands struck something solid, he explored, he delivered himself of a full round oath in English.

"A blind road, child," he said.

They retraced their steps. Would they be able to reach the last branching road without discovery? At a bend they stopped short. There was a gleam of an advancing light far down the passage.

"It is Akbar," whispered Uyuni. His swarthy evil visage was intermittently visible as he advanced, quickly but cautiously searching the alcoves and recesses. His great turban cast a colossal shadow like a vulture's wings outstretched on the vaulted ceiling. In his hand he carried a khanjar unsheathed.

Not far from where they stood, time had eaten a crevice in the wall. Into this the fugitives glided. It offered poor enough shelter, but it might suffice, and if by ill fortune they were discovered Galt would have to use his automatic. He carried it clenched in his fingers. It would be dangerous to rouse the echoes of the vaults but if the light fell on them, no

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other source lay open. Galt's arm encircled the girl's shoulders. They stood stock still as the footsteps grew audible on the still air. Now he was at the bend, and his dark face was clear in the lantern light. They scarcely breathed as he moved on. They stood partially shielded by a projecting fragment of wall, but some perverse fate caused a fragment to crack beneath Galt's heel. It was a sound no louder than the scurrying of a mouse, but it sufficed, Akbar turned. He saw and his dark eyes lit. A hoarse cry rose to his lips, but it gurgled in his throat and with his arms flung wide he fell like a stricken ox, while the lamp splintered and went out and the arched caverns echoed and re-echoed as if a regiment had fired a fusillade.

How often in the far-off days when Turk, Tartar and Saracen inhabited this underground city had those caverns resounded with the din of combat? How often had the echoes of these dim passages been awakened with the cries of the slain and the discordant clamour of the human hunting pack?

Galt knelt hurriedly in the darkness, Akbar no longer breathed. The face was already growing cold. They hastily dragged the body into the alcove they had evacuated. It must not be in the open to tell its tale to the Arabs. Already there was a crescendo of clamour in the distance. The girl's hand in his, Galt hastened stumbling along the passage. At a branch they wheeled from the direction of the cries, and fled down a long avenue. They did not pause till the shouting had died to an almost inaudible whisper.

"We're safe now, little comrade," said Galt with considerable relief. "What is the matter, My Eyes? You're shivering. They'll never reach us now." A light breeze swept up the cavern. "Look, isn't that a star? I'm certain it is. There must be a stair there into the upper air."

"Let us go—O quickly, effendi." When they reached the ground Galt looked into the girl's face. It was pale. Why had the child who had braved the trials of this night with such a stout heart, turned when all danger was gone, so suddenly fearful?

"Didst thou not hear?" she whispered, "the djinns." She gazed with terror stricken eyes at the opening they had left, as if dreading the appearance of one of those grisly beings. Shades of his childhood! Djinns! The wind, to her, had been their voices. She actually believed it, strange little Eastern child. She lived in a world perplexed by the fantastic demi gods or demi devils that he had read of in the Arabian Nights. Such things as Aladdin had evoked from the bowels of the earth by rubbing an old lamp, were actual living creatures to her.

"Have you ever seen any of these djinns, little comrade?" he asked solemnly.

"Yes, effendi, one," was the astounding reply.

"Hast thou not?"

"Well, no, I can't say that I have."

The desire to hear more of this rather unique experience could not for the moment be gratified. A dog barked at his heels, and Galt with the thoughts of supernatural beings in his mind, jumped. Back

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to earth they looked hurriedly about them. They were in a wall enclosed yard. They could dimly see reed and mutti huts of coolies along its edge. A donkey brayed. A cow moved in the darkness. There was a shuffling in one of the huts near at hand, and a voice called out angrily,

"Who is there?"

They stood still. The yard fell silent again, except for the occasional growl of the dog who scented strangers. The gate was not far off, swiftly they glided towards it, withdrew the bolts quietly and slipped into the street.

Almost beside them rose the city wall. They were now quite secure, Galt decided, for they were far from the lane where the night's misfortunes had begun, but to make assurance doubly sure they made a wide detour through the sleeping town. They did not meet a soul.

Galt forgot his questions about the djinn. His thoughts were busy on other themes. He must rouse his shebanas and set them on the track of the sheikh, yet he instinctively felt that this would be of little use now. The Scorpion and his hoshiyah would melt like a mirage. Very likely they were already fading like ghosts among the outside ruins. Some day he would return. Galt was sobered at the thought of the sheikh's return. He had felt confidence in his power over the people of El Ragi, but to-night he had had a slight glimpse of what inflamed Moslem fanaticism meant. Next time the whole town might be aroused, it might be an irresistible flood, and then. . . .

He looked at the girl at his side, walking silently, trustingly. He saw her as a helpless little bird battling in a storm. She was a Moslem. She was imbued with the spirit of Islam. She lived so thoroughly in the Koran that she even believed in the existence of those supermundane beings, the djinns, some of whom Muhammad had converted to his faith. Save the mark. She had seen one of these gentlemen. Perhaps even now her strange vivid Oriental imagination was weaving fantastic scenes in which these demi divine creatures were the central figures. And yet sooner than give herself to the loathed Scorpion, she had defied the ancient laws and deep rooted prejudices of her race. Brave little soul! He was actually glad now she had come to him. The night's adventure had given birth to a sense of comradeship with the Arab maid. They would fight out this thing together—come what might—and they would defeat the Scorpion.

The door of their home had clanged behind them. Sanctuary!

"Little friend," said Galt kindly as they paused a moment under the lamp that illuminated the batan mal hosh. "Brave little friend," he took her hand gently and drew aside her veil. She thrilled at the word, "Sadiq" (friend). and the touch of his fingers. Her eyes were like stars. Several times to-night the great hakim had called her comrade. "If you hadn't popped up to-night, they would have had me. I would have been jackal meat by now. But," and his face, Uyuni saw, grew grave, almost stern, "you must never again leave this house after

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sundown without my permission ; I do not know why you went out to-night, just a madcap freak perhaps. Do my orders make a prison house that you try to escape? But this is the last time. Of course you could not know the danger that threatened you. You must be on the watch all the time until we clip his wings."

"I knew they were here, effendi."

The hakim frowned. What mad caprice of this strange little Oriental maid could have sent her knowingly into the very mouth of danger?

"Why did you go, My Eyes?"

"I warned thee. Thou wouldst not listen. I feared for thee. I had seen Akbar. The fires of Iblis consume him, his wives and his children. Al-hamdulillah, he is dead. Unseen I came and heard. I warned thee." The flowerlike adolescence seemed to fade slowly from her face. "They might have killed thee. Alas, effendi, I knew not the danger I was bringing thee when I came to thy house. What is my peril to thine?"

With a sudden courageous light in her eyes she said:

"I will take this burden from thee. I will leave thee, effendi."

"And where would you go, child?" Galt asked.

Her head drooped slowly. "The desert," she whispered.

Galt smiled as he laid his hand on her millet head, and her eyes as she raised them to him began to glow softly.

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"You will stay here where you are, little com-
rade," he said. "Never fear, we will find a way
out. Now away you go to your bed."

XXIV

MY EYES

NEVER since the first day of her sojourn with him, had Galt been more impressed with the need of keeping himself vigorously aloof from his guest. It was only fair to My Eyes. He had experienced the temper of the Moslem mind. There must be no pretext, on which they could hang the breath of scandal, and in time they must come to learn how innocent were the relations between him and his ward. By their position the apartments he had assigned to her were well secluded.

At the same time there was certainly no reason why her stay should not be made thoroughly comfortable. But here he encountered a side of the child's mind he had not known. He was baffled and slightly chagrined. The rooms were black and cheerless when she entered them. They must be furnished. After all the cost would not be heavy on him, a few rugs, curtains, cushions, etc.,—but when he told her she must, at his expense, purchase these things in the suq, she shook her millet hair

in most emphatic negation. No arguments could move her. She wanted nothing.

"Hast thou not given the roof above my head, effendi?" she said.

That was all very well, but surely he could get her something to make her apartment a little more comfortable. Had she not those things she had brought from her home, she answered in surprise, her bed of date stems, her suf blanket, her copper urn and basin. In the name of Allah what more could she want? And so he must rest content. In his heart he admired the stubborn independence of her fresh young spirit.

Uyuni was little more than a phantom in the hakim's house. She lived in a world apart. The hakim's servants never went near her apartments. They learned with unmistakeable clarity that she did not wish it. She kept her rooms spotlessly clean. She drew water just before dawn and just before nightfall in a copper jar from the river brink. When the hakim met her thus burdened one evening at the door, he told her that henceforth the servants would draw the water. Her surprise was so genuine that he pressed the matter no further. "Bismillah," she said, "is it not the task of woman to draw water?" And she went on to her apartments shaking her millet hair in perplexity over the strange customs of the Infidel. Could it be possible that in the hakim's land women did not fill their jars at nightfall and daybreak at the river's brink?

In the evening a low rumbling sound could be

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heard by the hakim. At first mystified and not guessing the origin of the noise, he questioned his servants. "It comes from over there," said one, "I looked for I too wondered. It is the grinding of a stone mill. She makes meal of barley for bread." In a corner of the courtyard at dawn and dusk she built a tiny fire, and squatting above it fried her barley bread. On this, rice and dates, she lived. She made a captivating picture, Galt thought, with an Eastern flavour, as she bent above the tiny flame, her hair about her face in a cloud. Another seemed to enjoy the picture. Butras the shebana on guard at the gate was gazing upon her with kindling eyes. Galt grew thoughtful. The girl preoccupied by her task saw neither of them.

Galt at first thought that it would relieve the monotony of his existence if they should dine together. Besides it must be a rather lonesome life for her. But he quickly put the idea from his mind when he had made the suggestion to her. "Allah pardon thee. Do women eat with men in the land of the Infidel?" she asked, her eyes wide with amazement.

After breakfast she would leave the house to bring her father to his spot at the Mosque gate. She no longer tended such of the flocks as had been recaptured. On account of the danger to her, the work had fallen to Zobeidah. So all day she remained with the saiyid. The chill of age was on him and he seemed to lean more closely than ever on the child's companionship and guidance. When

each morning she would call gaily to him as she ran lightly towards his house, or would creep silently and mischievously to his side, a great peace would fall upon him, for he felt her presence even when she did not speak.

"Allah Akbar," he would say. "Safe. But thou must be ever watchful, My Eyes, for the Scorpion is crafty as the jackal. Obey the good hakim in all things." Then changing suddenly he would ask, "Yesterday thou didst fast the appointed time? Thou didst pray the five times ordered by the Holy Book? He seeks not to teach thee blasphemies?" To each of his questions he would demand an answer and seemed greatly relieved. The girl would laugh, and then add more gravely and with a sigh, "I greatly fear the good hakim has no religion. He never prays on the housetop or on the street."

"The Unbeliever shall perish. So saith the Koran," the sai'id would say portentously, sadly.

"But thinkest thou such as he will perish?"

The sai'id replied solemnly, "So saith the Koran."

"Then the Koran lies," cried the little lady.

"Allah forgive thee, child. Yet almost do I think Allah will deal lightly with such a man."

Galt was isolated. He was marooned on an island in the waste. It was therefore perhaps not so very strange that the tinkle of the girl's anklets as she moved like a ghost about his house should come to sound a little like the far-off pealing of bells. It

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was like faint Oriental music and carried with it a delicate sensuous pleasure. He began to regret that the comradeship begun that night in the caverns, could not continue. There they were in the same house and yet they were separated by the great barrier of race and religion, both almost as ancient and unchangeable as the dust of the desert, and by the bulwark of his honour. Across the barrier she began to appear as an alluring Oriental vision. He began to look forward to the one moment of the day when he spoke to her. That was when each evening she salaamed her good-night to him, calling down the grace of Allah on his head. She bowed so gracefully to the ground, her voice was so distinctly mellow, her benediction so earnest and her eyes were so expressive and disturbing. She looked like a princess, sweet, piquant, alluring, who had just stepped from the page of an ancient Eastern manuscript. As the days passed he commenced to invent excuses for detaining her a little while. He would get her to sit among cushions before him while he smoked a post prandial cigar. Then quietly and tactfully he would persuade her to talk of herself and her life. She was at first absolutely amazed at his request.

"My life, effendi?" she exclaimed, "Bismillah, what is that to thee? Thou wouldst not care to hear." But obviously the great hakim was in earnest, and though bewildered she smiled in childish pleasure. At first she was embarrassed before the great hakim. "What can I, a desert Arab girl, tell thee

that thou dost not know? I have pastured the flocks, the curse of Allah upon him that stole them. Through thy goodness, part have been restored, Alhamdullillah. I have brought the saiyid daily to the mosque gates, and sometimes to the cave of the divine Imam, so that we may be there when he returns to earth. Thou seest, effendi, these are commonplaces. There is nothing to tell that thou dost not know." But encouraged by a few kindly words she was drawn out, and frankly she unfolded the petals of her soul to the hakim. Through his tobacco smoke he watched her, a quaint little Oriental vision. Emotions played upon her features like breezes on a pool. How her violet eyes flamed with loyal anger when she told of the irreverent youth of El Ragi who would not listen to the exhortations of the saiyid.

Her love for her father was touching. Now those eyes were wide as she told him of the afrits and djinns, who dwell in the vast caverns beneath the earth, who possess no souls like mortal men. These djinns, she explained to the Infidel, who listened gravely, had great power. They could fly from the earth to the lower heaven, where the stars, those great diamonds, hang by golden chains. There were good djinns and bad djinns. The good ones of course were those converted by Muhammad. But alas, and she shook her millet hair, the evil djinns were capable of great wrongs. Were they vexed with a poor mortal very likely his crops would be destroyed, his flocks stricken by a blight, his family by a plague, and all sorts of other horrors would

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fall upon him. But of course these evil djinns would be well repaid. When Gabriel blew his trumpet on the last day the djinns would all die. They had no souls, and it would serve them right. But would not the good djinns also die? she was asked. She was doubtful about this. It was a hard question. Galt listened, quietly attentive and amused as she told him in her frank artless way the dreams of her days with the flocks. Then seated or strolling among the ruins she peopled her world with the angels and djinns of the Koran. She pictured the return of the Mahdi in the day of glory, when all the world would be Muslim. And at this she would look wistfully upon the unregenerate hakim.

"Do you think these djinns and such things exist?" Galt asked her.

"Yes, effendi. The Koran tells of them." That settled the question beyond a doubt in her mind. But of course the Infidel knew not the Koran, so she added, "And once I saw a djinn."

Now on another occasion she had made the same astounding statement. And certainly there wasn't a sign in her face to indicate that she wasn't in deadly earnest. He did not laugh.

"Where did you see it?" he asked gently.

"At the tomb in a desert where a great king is buried." Certainly thought Galt the Roman Emperor's soul has witnessed many strange scenes in its day.

"When was it you saw it?"

"I was a child,—many years ago."

"Wasn't it perhaps only a child's dream, My Eyes?"

She shook her millet head very decidedly.

"Nay, effendi. I speak the truth. There is on my side a long white scar made by his scimitar."

"All right, all right, child," the hakim agreed rather hastily. He fancied by a sudden movement Uyuni had made that in her eagerness she was about to furnish ocular evidence of the veracity of her statement.

Of course the explanation was simple. Some injury she had received in her early childhood had been woven by her imagination into this grotesque hallucination, yet somehow in the days that followed there kept recurring to his thoughts the figure of the weird genius of the Roman Tomb.

An unfortunate incident put a stop temporarily at least to these pleasant little talks. Galt was returning rather fatigued from an exacting day at his daftar. At his gate he stopped short. On the balcony just outside the girls rooms he could dimly in the gathering darkness see two figures. One he recognised immediately as My Eyes. Who was the man? It was not the saiid. Galt was surprised and irritated. The words were not distinct, though the voices were audible. Then it became apparent that the man was pleading in loverlike tones, and that the girl was plainly very angry. He recognised the man now. It was the shebana Butras and he was trying to take Uyuni in his arms.

Galt called out angrily. Keenly and frowningly

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he looked at them as they stood before him. Uyuni still with a flame in her violet eyes, Butras standing shamefacedly erect.

"Well, Butras?" the hakim asked sternly. He was disappointed in his shebana. But the Arab answered in manly fashion.

"Is it not meet that a man may woo a maid for his wife? I am now a shebana. I want a woman to rear my children. My eyes have looked on the daughter of Musa."

"As your wife?"

"Assuredly, effendi."

Despite the manly assertion, there was a strange unaccountable feeling in the hakim's breast that did not mitigate his anger. Frowning still he turned to the girl.

"Do you wish to be his wife, daughter of Musa?"

"Nay, jinabek," she said very clearly and very decidedly. "The fire of Iblis burn him to cinders."

"Butras," said the hakim, "you have your answer. If you annoy the daughter of Musa again while she is under my roof—you will no longer be a shebana." Butras went grey and saluted. The hakim waved them away.

In his room Galt's anger changed to self reproach and some slight wondering disgust with himself. What could be coming over him? He had been working too diligently, and the heat was trying to his temper. Iraq was not a country for a white man. The climate did not agree with him, or why should he have flown into a rage at the shebana? Butras

was a decent, loyal, hard-working fellow—a thoroughly good employee, and he had a perfect right to ask Uyuni to marry him if he wished. They were both Moslems. Perhaps he had been a little importunate, but now that Galt came to think of it, he had noticed before that the shebana was attracted to the girl. Could it be that he had actually felt relief that Uyuni had rebuffed his advances? What could be better than that she should marry? Then all this trouble would be at an end. Let the husband shield her from the Scorpion. He laughed shortly. Assuredly the isolation and the execrable climate were becoming too much for him. He the hakim el siyasi, engaged incidentally to a girl of his own land and his own station of life, had actually been angry at the idea of this Arab waif getting married. What was coming over him?

When Uyuni salaamed as usual later that evening he received her rather shortly. She was not his slave, he told her. She must not salaam to the earth before him. He swore to himself when she had left. She had gazed at him with wide uncomprehending violet eyes, amazed at his curtness. Why were her eyes so wonderfully expressive?

Later, seated in his room, Galt wrote a long screed to the girl of the photo. He had recently been negligent. He had been disloyal in thinking she would not understand. In none of his letters had he mentioned the Arab girl. Now he described her at considerable length, dispassionately and exactly. He had actually believed that the girl of the photo

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would not understand. He had even fancied that she might be jealous. It was all nonsense. Of course she would understand.

XXX

NIGHT AMONG THE REEDS

THE whole circle of the sky was dyed in softly blended shades. A full moon hung above the saiyid's enclosure. It was his early morning ride drew rein. At that time the home his ward had been born. Where was she now? Each morning about this time she came to lead her father to his station at the mosque gate. He had seen her leave his house but she was not in the enclosure, and she had no time to be idle there as the ancient saiyid squatting upon the ground. Very consistently and without much effort he kept rigidly aloof from the girl, but it would be an innocent enough pleasure to hear her voice. It was undeniably musical, even when speaking her guttural tongue. Who but she might say "Sabbahak allah bil kher, effendi" sound like anything but the croaking of a raven?

He sat firm on his horse, looking down on the river. In the time in ages past an arm of the river had fallen, undermined by the floods, and now formed a sheltered pool at the river's brink. Through a cleft a shaft from the newly risen sun shone on the

water. Galt held his breath. He feared that if he blinked the vision would vanish. It seemed indeed rather like a picture than reality. He had come upon a naiad or a mermaid. She stood motionless waist high in the water, her hair falling about her bare ivory shoulders in a cataract of gold. Heedless of the world from whose eyes she was hidden by the kindly rocks, she was enjoying the bliss of a dip in the cool stream.

"A painting for the brush of a master," thought Galt, but a hot flush slowly suffused his brow, and quietly he turned his horse. She had not seen him; she would not have seen him unless she had looked directly at his face, for the horse and his body were completely hidden by the mound in front. But on a sudden he had realised that it is scarcely a gentlemanly thing to gaze upon a lady in her bath. As he rode home he reviled himself as if he had wittingly stolen upon her sanctuary, but there was a stirring in his blood. How fair she was, how wonderfully fair, and how white!

And then had come the strange letter from the Mission at Basrah which had heard of Galt's discovery of the archæologists' journal. Over and over again he read it, puzzled and intrigued.

Then the amazing fancy came upon him. At first it was only a will o' the wisp, a gossamer thread as light and immaterial as the down that floats from the date palm. A voice was whispering to him, "White—white—white. Ivory white," while another voice, reason, answered scornfully, "Her anklets rattle as she walks and she prays with her face towards Mecca.

There are many races between Mosul and the Caucasus with skin as fair as hers."

. . . "Salaam, effendi." It was her evening farewell. She did not bow down now, for the hakim had forbidden it, but stood with her hands folded across her breast. Each evening those eyes, bright with unshed tears, seemed to probe into the marrow of his soul, and made him distinctly uncomfortable. Why did the hakim always dismiss her now with a single word? when before he had seemed to take pleasure in her tales? Wherein had she offended? If her hand offended she would cut it off, her eye, she would pluck it out. Was it the shebana who guarded the gate? In what way was she at fault, that the man sought to marry her? It could not be that, for what was it to the great hakim? And yet if need be she would kill the shebana, quite willingly. Each night her eyes asked these questions, but he always dismissed her, and with a sigh she left.

This evening he had not even spoken. He had looked at her closely and frowningly, seeming not to hear her salutation. Her heart was a stone in her breast as she turned.

"Come here, Uyuni."

He rose and put his hands on her shoulders, then turning her face till the light fell full upon it, peered at her long and earnestly. He still frowned, but her heart was no longer stone, for she saw he was not angry. He seemed perplexed; she could not understand. He took a strand of her hair and held it in his fingers, then raised a light and gazed closely at it, saying something in his own tongue which she could

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not understand. Then he nodded to himself and gave his strange command.

"Go to your room and prepare yourself. I will send my syce round for the horses. We are going to take a ride to-night in the desert."

When she had gone he said to himself, "It is a chance—only a chance. Perhaps I'm simply dreaming."

They rode their horses at a walk in the moonlight among the ruins. About them were the dim shadows of ancient caves, the home of the djinns; the mouldering towers of ancient El Ragi were bathed in an eerie light. The great minaret and mosque walls stood out against the sky, a majestic decaying monument of the glory of the Caliphs. Now the ringing call of the Muezzin, "Allahu Akbar," was replaced by the hoot and wheezing whistle of the owl, the cry of the night bird, and the long wailing whine of the jackal. It was a night of Eastern phantasy.

Often as he rode in silence Galt's eyes were on the girl. She seemed very Oriental from the veiled head to the ankleted feet set in the wide stirrups. She might have stepped from the pages of the *Thousand and One Nights*. And now his saner reason gained the ascendancy and whispered to him. "You are indulging in a dream of the warp and woof of those weird tales." It was partly to drive away this persistently recurring conviction that he was indulging in a dream and to grasp the fading vision and partly the human wish to delight his eye with the fresh young beauty of his companion that made him say, "There is no one to see you, child, except myself,

draw aside your veil." She complied. She obeyed him in all things. Her eyes were shining like stars.

To the girl this was a night of wonder. Beneath her was her horse "hakim el siyasi" and she was alone with the hakim whom she loved with all the passion of her soul. He no longer was angry with her. Her heart was filled with a great content. She knew not why the hakim had brought her out on this ride. It was his will, that was enough, and she was riding beside him. She would have gone thus to the uttermost edge of the desert. Always she had looked forward during the day to the one moment when she salaamed and he bade her good night, and to her couch she bore his kindly word and pleasant smile. How wonderful had been those evenings when they had sat together and talked, and how desolate the long watches of the night when she had lain awake wondering in what way she had offended him. Now all was well with the world again. Never for an instant did she harbour any fond delusions. The hakim was a star far out of her sphere. Yet how sharply had her savage little heart been stabbed by jealousy at the sight of something on the hakim's table. Wishing in some slight way to repay his kindness and to make herself useful, she had entered his apartments in his absence to tidy them. But what she saw drove her from the room. Who the girl of the photo was she did not know,—probably his wife, and she hated her with an unreasoning, but natural, instinctive hatred. She would have torn out the eyes of the original with pleasure, for this girl must be close to the hakim. Otherwise why would the photo

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be on his table? But to-night was hers and hers alone. O that this wonderful ride might last for ever.

"Look, My Eyes," said Galt. "A shooting star."

Despite the crystal clarity of the moonlight, the meteorite flamed in the sky before them.

"The wicked djinns are being driven from heaven," replied Uyuni, her eyes wide with awe, and her voice hushed. "They have been listening to the counsel of Allah's angels, and the angry angels are driving them off with those arrows of fire. It is well." She saw the hakim smile.

"Didst thou not know that, effendi?" she asked in surprise. How often had her father told her this truth, and yet the wise hakim did not know, but understanding came and her face fell a little. The hakim was an infidel. From him were hidden these truths.

"We have a different idea about shooting stars, My Eyes," said Galt, checking the smile, "but that is a pretty thought." Uyuni looked at Galt and sighed. Alas, that he was not a true believer. But the hakim's thoughts were elsewhere now. His gaze was fixed on a dimly outlined mound in the desert, towards which their horses were walking. Galt smiled at his fancies. He was following a will o' the wisp. Could anyone be more Arabic than this child?

They passed a modern Mussulman graveyard set in the heart of the ruins. To Galt's infidel soul, despite his natural reverence for the repositories of dead bodies, these graves with the rounded tops, looked just a little like brick dog kennels, and for the first time he wondered why they were built in that shape.

"So that the dead will have space to sit up and answer the questioning angels," answered the girl. "Well is it with the soul of those true believers who answer Munkir and Nakir faithfully. Those souls will come out of their mouths and will hover in peace over the graves till the last judgment. But alas for those who answer not well." She shuddered as she looked at the graves as if she actually saw the dire punishment being awarded these unfortunates. "These will be smashed with iron clubs into dust, and their souls will be tormented."

Uyuni looked at him in the moonlight. Her eyes were wistful.

"Sahib, why art thou not a Muslim?"

The question was rather staggering, but Galt did not laugh. It would have been brutal sacrilege he thought to have scoffed at such a frank earnest question.

"Why art thou an unbeliever?"

And then because theological discussions were rather out of his line, and because he was naturally inclined to be honest, and most of all because the girl's earnestness demanded a straight answer without subterfuge, he answered truthfully if rather lamely.

"I suppose the truth really is I am a Nasrani, because all my people are of that faith, child."

The child was frowning, puzzled and thoughtful.

"Knowest thou not, effendi, thou wilt be eternally damned?" asked the little evangelist. "Thou wilt never never see paradise. Thou wilt sizzle for ever in burning oil."

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"Not a particularly pleasant outlook," assented Galt gravely.

"Thy eyes shall be gouged out."

"Whew!"

"Thy nails will be torn off."

"Humph!"

"Thou shalt eat dust and cinders."

"Not a particularly nutritive diet. I shall get quite thin."

"Effendi, thou art laughing."

"Then you don't think there is any way of my avoiding these er—entertaining experiences?"

"I have read every word of the Koran in my room, effendi, to see if there is a chance. I have said in my soul the Koran has forgotten. Gabriel did not know thee, effendi, or the Koran would have been changed. Alas it is written on the Well Hidden Table at Allah's right hand."

The answer of course in the girl's mind was incontrovertible. For a moment Galt was troubled by a doubt. She believed implicitly in the Koran. In the mystic, oriental atmosphere of this ancient caliphate city, with this earnest little Muslim at his side, he felt convinced that the idea that had brought him into the desert had been a mere bodiless jack o' lantern. But supposing the idea had a sane material foundation, supposing there actually turned out to be some truth in his dream,—what then? Might it not be a very questionable benefit to her to find out that she was not Muslim born? The pillars of her faith would in time be shattered. But then his thoughts were clouded with the shadow of the Scorpion's sinister

figure, and the fate to which she as a Muslim woman would ultimately be sacrificed either with the Scorpion or another, and his doubts instantly vanished. If only his nebulous dream were true!

When he looked at her again there was a more cheerful light in her eyes.

"Yet do I think Allah will be kind to thee for thy good heart." Her loyal little soul flared up. "He cannot be unkind," she said passionately. "Unbeliever though thou art, thou art next only to Ali in greatness."

She was a Shiah Muslim. She had been taught, as Galt knew, by the saiyyid to venerate the name of Ali next only to the Arabian Prophet. The girl's soul was in her eyes. Her praise was fulsome, undeserved, but in the face of the sincerity of her worship words were inadequate.

"I pray for thee, effendi," she said quietly.

Galt did not smile. He spoke very gravely and very sincerely. "If the God of the world, the God of Christian and Mussulman, listens to any prayers, he will listen to yours, little girl," he said.

XXVI

MIDSUMMER MADNESS

THEY rode in silence, the daughter of Islam secretly revelling in the night that was hers, the man with his face set half expectantly, half ironically, on a grey hill in the distance. But then he smiled. He was following a will o' the wisp, but what a night this was. They drew outside the ruins and the horses broke into a trot. They were striking the dust of the flat desert now; there was no danger of the horses' legs being trapped in the air holes and half submerged gateways of the ancient underground city. Galt watched his companion in admiration. Her horse was now like a little spark of fire. With arched neck, flowing mane, neighing into the night it pranced forward, its tiny, sloping pasterned hoofs springing as though the desert were carpeted with rubber instead of dust. And what beautiful unconscious grace showed in every line of her healthy young body. She was enjoying her moment to the full.

"What a night it is, daughter of Musa," he said with a jolly laugh. He too was enjoying himself, and then, "What is it, child?"

She had drawn her pony to a stand, and there was a shadow of fear in her face.

"Go not that way, effendi." She seemed suddenly to have come back to earth, and realised that they were riding straight towards the hill, which she feared.

"Go not near that hill, effendi," she said; then in awe stricken tones; "it is djinn haunted." It was about this djinn of which she had spoken when they were lying hidden in the subterranean caverns that Galt wished particularly to hear, but he said casually with a smile, "My dear child, you may be perfectly correct that such beings as djinns actually exist, though I'll have to admit that I rather doubt it. But you are certainly wrong if you imagine that one of those gentlemen has made his home in that hill. The saiyid has probably told you. It is the tomb of a Roman Emperor, a great sheikh, who was killed in battle somewhere about here. From what I have read in history about this sheikh, I don't believe his spirit would consent to share his residence with anyone else, even a djinn."

"He is there," said the girl decidedly, "for I have seen him with these eyes." She was actually pale and her eyes were gazing with a sort of fascinated fear. Here was the puzzle Galt sought to unravel. Certainly her dream was very real to her—if it was a dream.

"What was this interesting gentleman like?" he asked.

"So tall that he reached almost to the moon," said the girl quite solemnly. "His voice was like the

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neighing of a thousand horses. In his hand was a huge sword which flamed like fire. Wallah, he was something to be feared."

"Wallah, he must have been," Galt agreed. He was slightly irritated. How absurd and grotesque was the child's fancy. He had hoped that this djinn of the hill might in some way have been associated with the tragedy of many years ago that had been enacted here. But this was out of the question. It was only a childish dream. He must try to rid her mind of the fantastic being, and see if he could not arouse some memory of the fatal night, if indeed his own dream were not as fantastic as hers.

"Well," he said, "if you are so sure that this formidable personage is there, I am going to ride on to investigate. I would like to see a djinn." He rode on alone.

"Effendi," she called, her voice shrill with fear. "Effendi," but he would not look back; he smiled into the air. There was a gentle patter of horse's hoofs in the dust.

Her emotions were clearly mirrored as her pony rode up close to his horse's flank. Her skin was still colourless and her eyes still wide with the dread which she was obviously striving to subdue.

"Poor little creature," said Galt to himself. "Afraid to be left alone anywhere in the vicinity of the dreadful being of her imagination."

But in the stress of her emotion her violet eyes sent forth a message for all the world to see, a message which her frank unsophisticated soul could not hide. Galt saw the look and his brows drew together

thoughtfully, for her eyes had said as plainly as spoken words, "Thy danger is mine, effendi."

It was near them now, the great mound raised by the labour of thousands of hands to perpetuate the name of the old Roman Imperial General, and to become, though this the builders could scarcely have guessed, the home of the grotesque spirit of an Arab girl's dream. The face of the great earthen pyramid was scarred and furrowed; the walls and guard towers that had surrounded it, had been beaten and levelled almost to the floor of the desert by the harrying dust and rain storms of centuries. Yet still after countless years the monument stood out on the plain, high, towering, portentous.

The girl, her fingers clutching the bridle rein, was staring before her as though she expected the hill to yawn, and to cast forth the fearful shape of the djinn of her imaginings.

"Allah," she whispered, "Allah."

"Uyuni," protested Galt, smiling to calm her fears. "You see there isn't a sign of a djinn here. If he ever was here the spirit of the Roman sheikh has driven him out. No child. There never was a djinn here. Get him out of your mind. There is not the slightest danger. Now I'm going to tell you why I brought you here."

But he might have been speaking to thin air. She kept murmuring "Allah." She was in the very ecstasy of fear.

"Uyuni,—child," he said more sharply. "It's all a dream, little girl. Don't you see. There is no djinn—never was a djinn."

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"No djinn," she said blankly, "no djinn."

"No, child, none."

"Here," she said, her hand on her side, "he struck with his scimitar. Wallah, do I not know? Is it not there, the white scar? He caught me up and struck, and cast me on the ground."

At that moment to Galt came clear conviction. The skein had been unravelled. There was no longer in his mind any doubt of it,—the journal of the archæologist, the girl's white skin, the letter from the mission at Basrah which had told of the existence of the babe, and now the child's scar and her intense fear of the mound. How natural it had been for the child brought up in the mystical oriental atmosphere to conjure up the grotesque spirit as the cause of her ills. The sordid desert tragedy of years ago rose vividly before him. Poor child. How much greater than she guessed were the wrongs she had suffered at the hands of the Scorpion. Perhaps even the sheikh did not know that this was the child of the woman whose body had been dragged from the Tigris. How closely the secret had been locked in the heart of the one man, who knew. Galt had felt a keen pleasure at the thought that the girl's troubles would soon be ended, that she could be sent now to the relatives in England of which the Mission letter had spoken, who had hunted so diligently for the archæologist and his family, and that she could for ever be removed from the danger of the Scorpion. But now before him rose the figure of the Muslim who had so jealously guarded the secret, who had raised and loved her as his own daughter, and had in

his fanatic zeal imbued in her the dogmas of his creed. Galt was troubled with misgivings.

A cloud was moving across the face of the moon, and in the gathering gloom Galt's horse neighed loudly. It was too much for Uyuni's overwrought nerves. It was a prelude to the appearance of the monster of her imaginings. With a wail she wheeled her pony and plunged away in panic into the night.

Galt called after her. It was useless. She was in the grip of sheer terror. Galt, knowing the truth, laughed, but in a moment grew grave. It was dangerous to go pounding at break-neck pace among the ruins. There were those countless abominable holes of the underground city. He called again, and spurring his horse set off in headlong pursuit.

Galt had laughed at Uyuni's belief in the djinn, but Galt was wrong. There may indeed be no djinns beyond the pages of Arabian Nights and the sacred books of Islam, but most assuredly spirits do move abroad in the shadowy Caliphate ruins in the moonlight. They are imps, provoking, mischievous little sprites who emerge from crevice, cave or ruin, and scamper about in the moonlight. They waylay and play most astounding unheard-of pranks upon the unsuspecting passer-by. How else could one account for the madness of this night?

It may have been an air hole yawning beneath the horse's hoofs, but one is half-inclined to believe it was one of those little beings, who detailed by his mates to lay the scene for an amusing little comedy, by some flutter of hands, or other sudden movement, frightened the hakim's horse, and caused it to plunge

and stumble suddenly. Galt's broken leg gave him a poor grip of the saddle; in an instant the world of tombs and ruins and djinns had flashed away into oblivion.

He was not seriously hurt. The fall had been heavy, but a kindly fate had ordained that he should receive no greater injury than the momentary shock and a graze from a stone on the temple. His eyes opened and he looked up in speechless amaze. He was clasped closely, fiercely, to a warm, fluttering breast. A tender hand was wiping his forehead with a veil, about his head the glory of her hair had fallen like a cloud, and in his ear was poured a stream of such anguished, pleading, endearing names in the guttural but strangely musical accents of a throaty desert bird, that surely his brain must soon be called from its stupor. On his forehead fell a tear.

But now, with a little cry of relief and dismay, the girl leapt to her feet and stood some distance away trembling. In the dreadful moments that had passed he had not been the hakim el siyasi. He had simply been the man she loved, and in the horrible moment of fear, a thousand djinns could have bellowed in her ears, and she would never have noticed them. But now she remembered, he was the great hakim of the English. He would be angry.

But one can imagine the imp chuckling and scampering away from his perch in the ruin to summon his mates to view the comedy that had begun. The hakim of the English rose slowly. His head was performing fantastic convolutions. The moonlight and the atmosphere of enchantment lying about

the ruins of Harun el Rashid's town were working a spell on his brain already befogged by the blow he had received, or it may be that the imps were now sitting about them, hugely amused on the mouldering walls and were exercising their mischievous wills on the great hakim of the English to their heart's content. Certain it is that to the girl's surprise he was not at all angry. He held out his hands.

"Come here, Uyuni," he said quietly, though a little hoarsely. Slowly, still trembling, she came. He put one hand on her shoulder and with the other tilted her chin, and looked long into the violet depths of her eyes. He was still swaying slightly on his feet.

"Binet, binet," he said in gentle chiding tones, and with a smile of great tenderness. "What have you done, little girl?" He drew a deep breath.

"My God, child, you are beautiful," he said passionately in English. "It's madness, midsummer madness," but he caught her to him and kissed her full on the lips.

XXVII

WITH HIS BEASTS AT EPHEBUS

MIDSUMMER madness! The piercing light shafts—the blistering, interminable days piled end on end—the abominable, everlasting heat of Iraq intermingled in some subtle alchemy with the elusive intoxicating enchantment of the mischief-making moon and the shadowy ruins; therein lay the cause. But Galt's attempt to explain the situation to himself logically stumbled before the amazing fact that the madness did not fade with the momentary embrace in the ruins. They had ridden back to the town in silence, and since that hour, now a week past, he had kept himself rigidly aloof from her. He built in his mind a bund to keep back the tide. He resolutely shut her image from his thoughts; but a mischievous spider had woven from a head of golden hair a web of golden thread which was stronger than a web of steel. The throbbing of his pulses at her approach, the almost unconquerable longing, they were all there, those ridiculous, but unmistakeable symptoms.

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Dinner, which as usual he ate alone, was over and the hakim sat in solitude, a cigar burning slowly in his lips. He was the only white man for many miles. To-night he felt deeply, poignantly, his isolation. He was daily feeling more keenly the growing hostility of the people, but come what may he was determined not to give in. Now stronger than ever was his determination. The girl was not alone to be saved from the Scorpion. The girl was his . . . his. The farash, moving about like a respectful ghost, for the hakim was deep in thought, carried away the dishes, removed a cloth and set a light on the table. The hakim always read at night. The farash shook his head. The hakim had eaten little. Was he ill or (horrible thought) had the dinner been badly cooked? He would speak to the Indian cook. He would beat him. Wallah, what could one expect from one who worshipped oxen, and peacocks and snakes, and knew not the law of the prophet? The world was still. The Arabs, except those who frequent the gahwas and theatres, go to bed almost with their poultry. There was no sound except the single clank as the sentry at the gate grounded his rifle, but the hakim seemed to be listening. The farash's lips parted in a slow, knowing smile as he slipped away. Why had it not come sooner?

From the batan mal hosh came a gentle, tinkling sound. She was coming to say good night. The simple sound was like the haunting strain of music, making a purple riot in his heart. He had fought with his beasts at Ephesus, and now in his loneliness

the beasts were conquering. He conjured up a picture of another fair face, but at the crucial moment that face was like a substanceless shadow. Loyalty and affection were both forgotten. A voice whispered to him: "Remember she is of thy people. It is your duty to make certain and let the world know." A djinn does not make wounds. "Remember, too, be she Arab or English, she is your ward." But an insistent djinn intervened. "She offered herself freely to you when she first came to your house. Remember she is a Muslim. To her such a state is normal, legal among the Arabs . . . and she loves you."

A vision called into being by a djinn of the lamp appeared in the doorway. How fair, how wonderfully, elusively fair she was with the light gleaming on that millet cloud. What resolutions could have withstood that witching charm? In his nostrils was a subtle aroma, blended of the sweet wholesome scents of the meadows of England. . . . Yes, he was sure they were there, blended with the intoxicating heavy perfumes of Arabi. The dumb wonder and sadness that had shadowed those wonderful violet eyes at his aloofness since that night a week ago among the ruins, vanished now at the look on his face, like a mist before the sun. There was a complete transformation. All hesitation fell from the hakim like a cloak and he held out his arms to her. He scarcely recognised his own voice, it was so hoarse as he called to her.

The colour was flecked from Uyuni's face. The

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hour for which she had hoped and which in some indefinable way she feared, had come. Pale, trembling but happy she came to his arms as frankly as a bird to its mate. For a second time he clasped her to him, their lips met and for an æon their souls flowed together under sun-tinted arches into a sea of oblivion. He held her at arm's length, clasping her shoulders and laughed for pure joy.

"You witch . . . you witch," he said. Then as there flashed upon him the vast gulf they were bridging, with sudden jealousy, "You will be true to me, Uyuni. Swear before your Allah, Uyuni, you will be true to me." He looked piercingly, hungrily into those violet wells. His answer lay there, clear as daylight, even before she spoke.

"I am thine, sahib," she said simply. A light shadow crossed her eyes like a ruffling ripple on a pool. "Until thou art weary of me," she choked, "and after always." All unconsciously her virgin soul had mirrored the eternal tragedy that hovers like a bird of ill omen above the pathways of those who flout the ancient laws and conventions of mankind.

Galt was touched. His passion ebbed.

"If I weary of you, binet, what then?" he asked gently.

She shuddered. "Then the desert will come into my heart, sahib, and love for no other man can grow in it."

"You think that I will weary of you?"

The light had gone from her eyes leaving a blank

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desolation. She was now the Muslim who bowed to the inexorable laws of fate.

"Maktub, it is written. Thou art the hakim el siyasi. Some day," her lips trembled ever so slightly, "thou wilt go to thy land and to her whose face smiles at thee from thy table. But not to-day, Allah may the day be far off."

Slowly his hands dropped to his side and he sank back on his chair. Wondering, questioning, she dropped on her knees before him and placed her carmined fingers on his knee. What had suddenly come over the hakim? Was he ill? Had she not answered him truly? Did he not believe that she would be true to him until he tired of her and left for his own land, and after . . . long after? Troubled, she watched him. She could not guess that it was that very loyalty, clear as the sky, that had wrought the sudden change in the hakim, that had caused his passion to grow chill. She could not know that the very completeness of her surrender was his undoing.

She grew suspicious. The look which he now bent on her, aloof, appraising, hakim like, kindly, fatherly, was illuminating. She sprang to her feet, a choking little sob in her throat, and stood apart, her bosom heaving and her eyes flashing through her tears. Puzzled, Galt saw her hand fly to the back of her head and tug and jerk viciously at her hair, which was coiled in a way vaguely familiar to him. Now it fell about her shoulders in a shining cataract.

"I will not be like her," she choked, and then he

understood. To please him, she had fixed her hair in the same coil as the girl in the photo. She had probably stood long before that picture studying, and striving to tame those wild millet sheaves.

"It is more beautiful as it is now, Uyuni," he said tenderly. But the girl's eyes still flamed.

"Why didst thou lie to me, effendi?" she cried gustily. "When thou didst hold me in thy arms, thy face said 'I love thee even more than the Prophet loved Maryam.' Thy look made the desert the Garden of Paradise." She drew away fiercely. "It is she . . . she who has driven it away." Turning, she flashed from the room; almost instantly she returned and threw at his feet the torn fragments of the execrated photograph.

Galt looked at her gravely; then a gentle smile crooked the corners of his ample mouth.

"What a little savage you are, Uyuni."

Anger died out of her face, at the kindly reproof, and she looked hopelessly at the scattered pieces on the floor.

"Alas, effendi. . . . Canst thou forgive thy servant?" she said falteringly.

Galt's unruly passion which he had held in curb was succeeded by a great tenderness. To him had been vouchsafed in the moments that had passed a clear divination. He knew now that the pale star of his love for the girl to whom he was engaged to be married, and whose image now lay in ribbons, had for ever faded, and in its place had risen a sun.

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Tenderly he took Uyuni's hand in his. She deserved the truth, though he felt some hesitation in telling it.

She was not surprised, though an arrow of jealousy transfixed her, to learn that the girl of the photo would one day be the hakim's wife. Probably he would have many other wives in that far-off land. It was the way of man. Her heart became a barren wilderness. They must for ever remain as strangers. That is what he told her, gently. This was beyond her understanding, for he kept saying that he loved her. What could the hakim mean?

"It is because I love you, little Uyuni. . . . Not for her sake or for mine, but for your own," he kept repeating to her, holding her hand, and looking into her eyes. She listened in wonder to this thing that she could not understand, a thing which seemed, while it laid a cold hand on her passion, to answer an inarticulate craving of her soul, and somehow brought a ghost-like peace. For her sake? He did not mean the danger from the people. That was real, but the hakim knew she would combat that fearlessly beside him. No it was something else. He was speaking to something within her. What was it? He was calling to some voice within her which alas could not answer. He saw the despair in her eyes and murmured, "Poor little girl." She must understand, she told herself. He would love her more if that voice could answer him. She must understand. Befogged, struggling, lost in the meshes of her oriental non morality, she sank on her knees before

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him, with a little despairing wail. His heart was filled with a vast fatherly tenderness.

"It will come. . . . Light will come. Good-night, Uyuni," he said softly.

XXVIII

A GIBRALTAR OF HIS FAITH

THE ancient saiyid stood before the hakim el siyasi in his office, whither he had been summoned. The old body, lean and bent with years, was still sustained beyond its natural term by the inner, spiritual strength, and by the hope which still stirred his breast, exalting it, that he might live to meet the Mahdi. On his brow sat the serenity that came from contemplation, life long musing in solitude. But now the sightless visage was graven with displeasure and something deeper.

"Hakim of the English," he said, the sonorous voice vibrant with feeling, "against thy word which I held sacred, which thou didst swear on thy Book, thou seekest to make her a Nasrani, an Infidel, who believes not in the true Allah. Thou wouldst destroy her soul."

The hakim was heated. "I am not a missionary, I have told you so already, I have no quarrel with your religion. Religion doesn't enter into the question at all. What I want is the truth."

"Why hasn't the fellow eyes?" Galt thought

testily, "so that I could get some idea of his thoughts? He's a graven image with about as much expression as a sphinx." He was in the presence of æon old sophistication. What power on earth can force an Arab to disclose the secret which he wishes to conceal? The saiyid did not answer.

"You are a saiyid, learned in religion, and wise in the word of Allah. Does your Koran teach you to lie?" Galt was thoroughly angry.

For an instant a tremor passed through the saiyid's frame at the blunt insult, as if a draught of cold air had struck him.

"I do not lie, effendi," he said slowly.

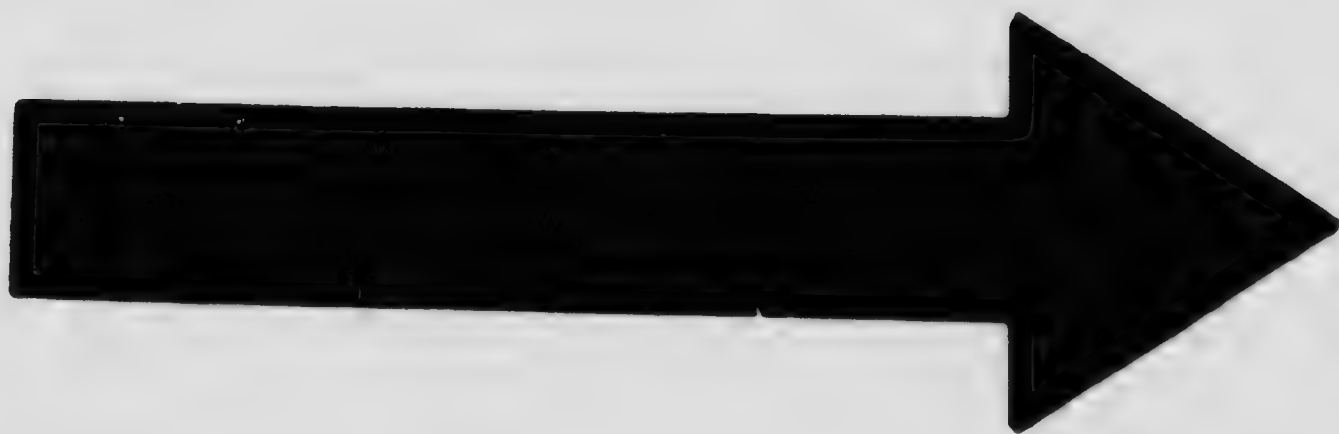
"You love My Eyes. No English father could have treated her more kindly than you have since she came into your hands . . . " Galt began.

"She came into my hands at birth, O hakim," returned the other stubbornly. "Born of the body of Asma, my wife, gathered even at that moment by the angel of death into the Paradise of the True Believers."

"She is not your child," said the hakim el siyasi. "She is the daughter of the English archæologist, who was killed by the Scorpion in the desert. You only know the whole truth, but this is the truth."

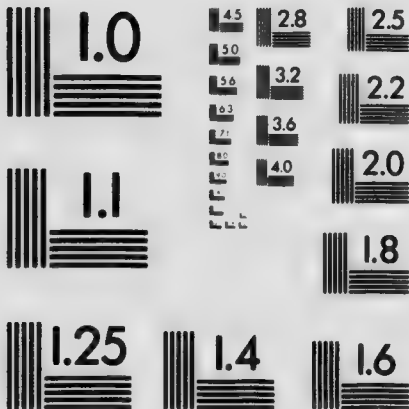
"She is the child of my wife Asma, on whom be peace," reiterated the saiyid.

A grim smile came to the hakim's lips at a sudden thought. He called the farash and whispered in his ear. The saiyid waited, no doubt wondering at the pause. In a few moments the boy returned carrying



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a heavy brown volume, on the cover of which was Arabic inscriptions. The hakim rose.

"Saiyid Musa," he said solemnly, "there is in the room a copy of the Koran. Will you swear on the Koran that Uyuni is the child of your wife Asma?"

The saiyyid's body stiffened, and to Galt's watchful eye, a cloud for an instant passed over his face. He did not answer. Galt might as well have been talking to deaf ears. He had taken an unfair advantage of the devout old Muslim, but he was determined to know the truth, and now if he had had any faint lingering doubts, they were dispelled by the saiyyid's silence. He nodded to himself, while the ancient Koran reader, placing his hand on his heart, solemnly pronounced the kalima.

"La illaha illa Allah, wa Muhammad er rasul Allah."

"You love the girl," said the hakim quietly, "as your own daughter. You wish to keep her with you. That is natural, but here in my hand I hold a letter, written by the Mission at Basrah, which tells me about her blood relations. They hunted long for her family but could find no trace. They will be glad to hear that she lives. She will go to them in England. She will be raised as an English woman, which she is. You have not the right, saiyyid Musa, though you have loved her well and raised her tenderly, to keep her from the life which is her due."

"She is a true Muslim, alhamdulillah," said the

old man. He no longer denied. Probably he felt it useless; yet he would not agree, but maintained a stony reserve. "What better life could she have, effendi, than the life of a True Believer? But thy eyes are sealed more firmly than mine. Thou canst not see."

A victory was won and lost. Galt argued strongly, and at times even threatened, but to no avail. The Muslim was adamant, a Gibraltar of his belief. The saiyyid was fighting not alone to keep with him the child he loved, but he was fighting for her soul. It was futile for Galt to attempt to prove that the life of a European woman would be preferable to the life of a Muslim; that it was the child's right to live among the people of her own blood. It was useless even to show that she would be freed for ever from the danger of the sheikh, though when he spoke of this Galt saw that the old man was shaken. The old man's reply was, "She would be taught the idolatry of the Nasrani."

Galt was baffled. With the foster father threatened with bereavement he could deal, and stood on common ground, but with the fanatical Muslim he was lost. Between them rose grim and immutable the great barrier of Faith. He had planned to write at once to the dead archæologist's brother, of whom the letter which he held in his hand told. He still lived, so wrote the Basrah Mission, and would prize greatly the journal of his dead brother. How much more he would prize, thought Galt, his brother's flesh and blood, the child Uyuni; how keen was his own desire that Uyuni should have all the advan-

tages to which her birth entitled her. But Galt knew that he must move slowly. He realised the weakness of his position. He had no positive proof of the child's identity. The astute old Moslem, eager to keep the child and to preserve her soul in the true Faith, had guarded the secret closely. Even the Arabs of El Ragi did not guess the truth. What would happen if Galt took matters into his own hands and tried to send this girl away to England? The Arabs, already disturbed, would be incensed. They would not believe his tale, and the old teacher could easily rouse them to a frenzy. Even Galt's own department might not support him, for he had not definite proof. The fruits of his work among the Arabs, already in jeopardy, would be destroyed. The whole thing hinged on the attitude of the *saiyid*. He must be won over. The outlook for this looked discouraging enough. The graven visage was bleakly forbidding.

"Very well, *saiyid Musa*," said the hakim, "you may go now, for the present. Let me suggest to you to read your Koran carefully so that when we meet again you can tell me where in that noble book it tells you that you can rob the girl of her birthright." Without replying, the *saiyid* turned slowly and left the apartment.

At the mosque gate, whither according to custom she had led him, the *saiyid* interrogated Uyuni closely. She must repeat for him *sura* after *sura* of the Koran, "*Bismillah, er rahaman, er rahim*" (in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Forgiving),

and with anxious ear he listened for any sign of faltering. Unfortunately her thoughts were far away; her lips were confused in their utterance, for on them were pressed his lips. Her heart was in a tumult. What were all the saws and maxims of the Holy Word to her? She was living in a land fairer far than the paradise of groves and crystal waters of which the suras told her. On her heart strings was being played a wilder, sweeter strain than the music of the Seventh Heaven. It was all a mirage, she knew. It would fade. Sometimes her fierce little spirit rose in an agony of rebellion, but to-day her heart was saying to her, "Whatever happens, he loves thee . . . he loves thee . . ." to the sad havoc of the suras of the Koran.

The old man shook his head greatly perturbed.

"The poison is working," he said low to himself.

Like a little parrot she quoted, stumbled, and stopped in the midst of a sura.

"Are the women of the land of the Infidel very beautiful?" she asked suddenly and quite irrelevantly.

The saiyid started.

"What hath that to do with the sura? Proceed, child," but Uyuni shook her head. "Nay," she said, "it wearies me."

"The poison is working," he repeated to himself. "For the sake of her soul she must be taken from the house of the Unbeliever. She will learn the blasphemies of the Nasrani. Bismillah, it were better even if she were the wife of the sheikh." Aloud he

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said slowly, "I will not preach to-day, My Eyes. Lead me to the cave of the Divine Leader. I must seek his counsel in prayer, for clouds gather about me."

XXIX

FROM SANCTUARY

THE desert was wrapped in its cloak of langour and unfathomable mystery; the ruins of El Ragi slumbered in their shroud of grey dust. It was a typical breathless Eastern night when the stars seem to lie almost on the very bosom of the desert. But within the walls of El Ragi the air stirred with the murmur of voices. It was the evening hour of prayer. The call of the Muezzin, loud, sonorous and clear, sounded across the flat roofs. "Allah Akbar . . . La illaha illa Allah wa Muhammad er rasul Allah," but to-night there was an unusual buzzing of voices from the mosque. Galt, sitting on the roof of his billet, heard, and was slightly disturbed. Having daily become more sensitive to the temper and changes of mood of his people, he felt, he knew not why, something menacing in the sound.

He turned at the sound of a heavy tread from the staircase, and the light of the lamp hanging from the framework above the table fell on the form of the shebana Butras. The shebana saluted with grave face.

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"I have come to warn thee, O hakim," he said.
"Listen, effendi, to thy servant."

"Yes, Butras; speak."

"Trouble for thee is brewing in the town to-night, effendi."

Galt frowned. "Trouble? In what way, Butras?"

"The nakhla of great branches grows from the small date seed. The river is Yingas which destroys is the same river as the Tigris Yezid which in the summer flows like a lamb. Allah, I have heard many murmurings in the bazaars and the coffee shops, but I said, 'It is nothing, it will pass!' I was wrong. It has grown to this."

"Yes, yes," said the hakim impatiently. "Be more clear, speak to the point, Butras."

"Hear, O hakim."

The distant murmur rose higher in the air.

"I have been listening to that, Butras. It is more than the usual noise at the hour of prayer. What is it?"

"Effendi, he is there."

"Who?"

"The Scorpion. May the hot sun blister him. May jackals eat his bones, the stoned one, son of a noseless mother. To-day he came from the hills and is now at the mosque with his hoshiyah."

"If that is all, it is not such bad news," said Galt. "I think, Butras, we will make it interesting for the Scorpion. He'll not get away so easily this time. I will send you on an errand at once to some little dark soldiers who will receive your message with joy."

He seated himself at the table, and began to scribble a note on a piece of paper.

"Alas, it is not all. The whole of El Ragi is roused against thee. The Scorpion speaks to the people and they applaud him. I heard one shout as he entered the mosque gate, 'Cursed be the Lame One, the Infidel who sent thee into exile and stole the inmates of thy harim, O bright star of thy servant's footsteps.' It is so with them all. Already they forget what thou hast done for them and their children, O great hakim."

The loyal shebana's face was flushed with anger.

"Thou hast heard the words of the Holy Koran, effendi. 'They who believe fight for the religion of Allah; they who believe not fight for the religion of Taghut, the Idol. Who fightest for the religion of Allah, be he slain or victorious, we will surely give him a great reward.' The djinn-possessed Mullah is so preaching in the mosque. He says it is Allah's will that thou, the unbeliever, be slain, thou O great hakim. Bismillah, he is mad. They are all mad. Almost I made him feel my khanjar in his ribs, even in the mosque, though for that I should be eternally damned. They will attack thee. Allah, I know it. I know those fools. A thousand times I heard them cry, 'Slay the unbelieving dog!'"

Galt listened, grimly thoughtful, the letter he had written crumpled in his hand. He was naturally not winolly unprepared for such news, but it was not pleasant to hear the words that sounded a knell to long cherished ambitions. All El Ragi roused against him, all his works forgotten, the structure he

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had raised destroyed. He was not in the mood to consider this purely transitory, to realise that if the storm was weathered all would be well.

"Where are the shebanas, Butras?" Galt asked.

"Five are in the batan mal hosh below."

"Where are the others?"

The shebana's brow darkened.

"Allah curse them. They are in the mosque, effendi."

"Are they?" said Galt, and made no further comment. "Take this note to the Gurkha camp beyond the ruins. They will smile and sing to their knives when they read it, Butras."

"Yea, effendi."

"Ride as if a djinn were on your heels."

"Yea, effendi."

Butras straightened and saluted. Galt put his hand on the shebana's shoulder and looked into his eyes. They were no longer hakim and servant; they stood man to man.

"The daughter of Musa, she too is in danger. Remember that. Let no one hinder you."

Butras turned, and in a flash was gone. Almost instantly there was a clatter of hoofs from the street below. Galt smiled. Butras was an Arab horseman; the night was to him as the day. He was like a hawk on wing. The clatter died, but from the distance came a single sharp detonation. Galt's smile vanished and his face grew momentarily grave; then his anxiety lifted. Probably someone had shot at the orderly, but in such darkness, and with such a fleet-

ing target, what bullet if not fired point blank could reach its goal, except by the wildest freak of chance?

Galt's thoughts quickly veered from the shebana and his brows knit. It was quite dark, the sky was lit only by the myriad, brilliant stars, hanging low over the desert. It was past the hour when she should appear to bid him good-night. What detained her? Never before had she been so late. Growing more anxious he called a servant and bade him summon the daughter of Musa at once from her apartments, and he paced the roof as he waited. The stupid servant seemed to take an unconscionable time in fulfilling a very simple errand. There he was at last, but the Indian was shaking his head. He had gone, as the sahib ordered, to the apartments of the daughter of the blind Arab. She was not there; nay, more, those few things she had brought with her when she came, the copper water jar, the mill with which she ground barley, these also had vanished. The apartment was bare as if the daughter of the blind Arab had never been there. He had questioned the other servants, and they had told him she had gone as usual at dawn. Later she had returned,—when no one knew, for no one had seen her,—had taken her few things and departed.

Galt was dumfounded. Gone,—and the sheikh in El Ragi.

Through his mind flashed certain words of the sayid which he had ignored. The old fellow had threatened, when Galt repeatedly questioned him, about Uyuni's parentage, to take the child away, but he had not dreamed that the threat would be carried

out. But now it had actually happened. The triply qualified Muslim fool! To prevent her from remaining with the Infidel, where she might be contaminated by Nasrani idolatry, he had actually taken her from security and thrown her into grave danger. On any other night the matter would not have assumed such a serious aspect. Before any harm would befall, no doubt he could in some way have persuaded the saiyid to restore her to the protection of his roof. But tonight, with the Scorpion in El Ragi, the case was alarming. At any moment she might fall into his hands. On the air was borne from the direction of the mosque the menacing murmur of the populace. Hurrying down the staircase to the batan mal hosh Galt called the shebanas assembled there about him and interrogated them. Had any of them seen the saiyid and his daughter?

One who had just entered the courtyard as Galt descended answered promptly.

"Yea, effendi, as the sun was sinking into the ground I saw them. They were going into the desert from the north gate. With them was a small milk-white hamar which carried a water jar and other household things. I called to the saiyid in greeting, 'Salaam Alekum,' but he answered not. He seemed not to hear. I saw that beneath her veil the daughter of Musa was weeping, and as they passed she many times turned her head and looked back on the town. I wondered at this and I followed. 'Why does thy daughter weep?' I asked, but he answered sharply, 'That is naught to thee, stranger.' 'I am no stranger, thou blind one,' I replied, 'but Abbas

whom thou well knowest, a shebana to the great hakim. Whither go you?' I was angry. 'Whither would one go when the day's task is done?—to our home,' said the saiyid, but the girl, his daughter, spoke. 'Nay,' she said, and her voice choked with tears, 'to the desert. Tell the good hakim, thy master. . . .' But the saiyid bade her 'peace,' and on they went, effendi, where I know not, whethe to the saiyid's house or, as she said, the desert."

"Abbas," said the hakim, "you must follow them at once. Take two other shebanas here with you. Search for them and find them. They may still be at the saiyid's house. If not search the ruins. They cannot have gone far in the night. The daughter of Musa is in danger. She must be found and brought to this house. Do no harm to the saiyid, but do not dare to return without the girl. Now go."

Abbas with two others who stood with him saluted and hurried out through the gate. Three only remained, for Abbas alone had joined the five who had come with Butras. Two of these Galt despatched immediately in the direction of the mosque, under the order that they must keep watch on the movements of the sheikh and his hoshiyon and give warning of the approach of danger. Placing the remaining shebana on guard at the gate, he again ascended the staircase to the roof.

XXX

HUE AND CRY

As the minutes passed, Galt became more anxious. He was disturbed by pictures which he could not drive away of what might be happening to the girl. If she had got to hear of the danger which threatened her, she might have been able to take refuge in the underground vaults of the ancient city ; then all would be well. But even now she might be the captive of the Scorpion. His tribesmen might be carrying her across the wastes to desert fastnesses, and this time the Scorpion would take good care that he went far beyond the chance of pursuit. But now there was another danger, even more to be feared in its possibilities. It lay behind that sinister murmur rising from the mosque. The fire of fanatical frenzy, which was even now probably becoming a conflagration, had been lighted by a brand in the hands of the Scorpion. The fuel that fed the flames was the Muslim girl's slavery to the unbeliever. The sheikh wished to regain her for his harim, but the people, once thoroughly aroused in their fanatical zeal, might break all bonds. If they found her they might kill her. Galt shuddered at the thought of how Moslems

have at times treated their women who have erred against divine laws. The innocent daughter of Musa might suffer the same fate.

He cursed most soulfully the blind old zealot who led her away from her haven. He was more than a little angry, too, at Uyuni herself. She should not have allowed the saiyid to persuade her. It was unpleasant to think that she had intended to leave, probably for ever, without a word to him. But his anger against her faded. She had not gone lightly. The word of the shebana Abbas showed that. "Tell the good hakim . . ." What had been the undelivered message? Certainly the saiyid had used some potent argument to cause Uyuni to leave him for ever.

He paced the roof, peering constantly into the street, watching for the shebanas and the girl. Why were they not coming? There was still the buzzing in the air. Would they be able to find her and bring her home before the storm broke upon him? Even here there assuredly would be grave danger for her, but here he could defend her. There were the stout walls, his few shebanas, and soon the little dusky warriors from beyond the ruins would, (in answer to his despatch), be creeping into the town. He could defend her here till the Gurkhas came, but out there in the darkness . . . If they did not come soon he must go himself into the desert and seek her.

Standing alone under the stars, with the storms gathering about him, it came upon Galt what the girl's safety really meant to him. Whether she was white or only the daughter of the desert made no dif-

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ference. He loved her. In communion with the stars in the silent night, the ancient, unalterable, levelling laws of true love held absolute sway in his heart. If she could but be saved he would willingly give his own life.

A faint murmur stirred in the air, growing steadily as he listened. The mosque had grown silent; this sound came from the opposite direction. It was as yet a scarcely audible buzzing which seemed to issue from the desert wastes, but an eerie note in the vibrant whisper fell unpleasantly on Galt's ears. Vague at first and indeterminate as if the vast ruins had gained a voice, the sound gradually became focussed on a definite point, the northern gate of the town, above which the Polar Star shone like a brilliant gem. Perplexed and wondering, Galt listened keenly, and in a sudden crescendo of the sound he understood. What noise in the world is like the savage bestial cry of a Muslim pack, religion crazed? It issues from the throats of many humans, but it is the single voice of a super animal. Galt had heard such a sound in the caverns beneath El Ragi. Now he could distinguish the shrill cries of women, the throaty calls of men, the squeakings of children, all caught into an infernal babel. Galt called to the shebana on the street below. Yes, was the reply, he heard. The pack was coming closer, but what it pursued he could not guess. Probably a thief had been discovered looting the small bazaar at the city wall.

A thief? Perhaps after all it was nothing more than that. Poor devil. And yet. . . . Why had he not put more lights into the town streets?

They were set much too far apart. The crowd was rapidly coming into the centre of the town; he could tell that by the growing volume of sound, but as yet he could see nothing. Vaguely troubled, despite himself, he kept his eye on a distant bend in the street, which possessed a single light against a blank wall. Much of the ground between was open so that his view was unimpeded. Probably the pursuit would pass that way. And then on a sudden his heart grew cold. For a single instant only his eye caught the scene, for like the closing of a shutter it was flicked away, but that moment was sufficient to brand it on his brain. Beyond the dim radiance of the distant lamp, he saw the confused, maddened crowd, and in front the pathetic little stumbling figure. Then the lamp had gone out and everything was lost in darkness. It was she—Uyuni. It was she the crazed Muslim mob was pursuing, and,—Galt felt physically sick,—there could be no doubt of it; they were inflicting upon her the age old diabolical punishment of the female transgressor. They were stoning her. The lamp had been smashed by a stone.

He rushed down to the gate, and stumbled with breakneck speed out into the uneven street. Calling on the shebana to follow, he shouted into the air to the child that he was coming, but he could hear no reply. If any was given it was drowned in the clamour of her pursuers, which was now growing rapidly louder. Never had Galt in the days before he had been injured, even in broad daylight, covered the ground more quickly than now in the dark, rutty,

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stony streets. A loud exultant chorus beat on his ears, and his fear grew more poignant. At a bend in the street, where another street lamp spread its feeble light, he was upon them. He called sharply, "Uyuni," and with a choking cry the staggering, beaten little body sprawled shaking and whimpering at his feet.

Galt rushed past the prostrate child, and, raising his arms, called hoarsely to her pursuers. Although the shebana was at his heels they were all in danger of being smothered in the avalanche, but now at the edge of the light, crowding and jostling into the narrow neck of the street, they drew to a swaying halt, and the cry of exultation with which they had greeted the fate of their victim died to a sullen murmuring at the sight of the hakim mal Anglez. They were a gathering, as Galt could see, of shreds and patches, the offscourings of the town, coolies and desert prowlers, the inhabitants of the hovels that ringed the city wall. They obviously came from the sector that had first roused Galt's determination to clean the town, a resolution that he had carried out in face of their protests. The more ignorant such people are, the more easy it is for them to be roused to a pitch of religious frenzy, and now, thought Galt with scorn, it was actually this flotsam and jetsam that howled and bayed on the path of the poor, innocent child that lay at his feet like a wounded bird with broken wing.

The upraised hands on the point of hurling the stones they held were lowered, and the crowd stood still an instant in a sort of awe. Their fear of the

hakim had cast a spell for an instant over their inflamed minds. Galt took advantage of the respite to issue a warning. He spoke to them in the only manner they would understand.

"You jackals,—you howling desert rats,—you murderers. Do you think the British hakim has no eyes and no arm? Are you shaitan possessed? Do you think my hakuma will not repay you for this?" and he pointed to the prostrate figure. "If you did not know, then know this. As the hakim el sivasi I now take the daughter of Musa under my protection. She is from this moment shielded by the arm of the British hakuma. Let one more stone be cast, let one more hand be raised against her, and I will hang the offender to the gallows in the square," and then on a sudden inspiration he issued a further warning, which he knew even in their crazed state would bear great weight with the Muslims. "And do not think, you desert vermin, that the soul of the offender will go free to paradise from the gallows. No unbeliever will hang him, but one of my shebanas, a Muslim, and his mouth will be filled with filth so that his soul will be polluted when it leaves his mouth. By your Allah I swear it."

Having issued his dire threat, which struck terror into the heart of the Muslims, he turned and gathered the little moaning figure into his arms. The eyes were closed in a pallid face; there was a great bruise on her cheek, and even though he raised her gently, the battered little body shrank from his arms. For an instant tenderness and pity overcame him and he buried his face in her hair. But quickly realising the

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need of action, he started forward towards the haven of his gate. With his burden his steps were slower now, and he knew that as soon as the crowd was relieved of his presence, the spell would be broken, and the throng would be baying at his heels. But the respite proved sufficient. With the child rolling and moaning in his arms, the shebana at his heels, and the crowd again clamouring in his wake, he succeeded in gaining his house in safety. He heaved a sigh of intense relief as he heard the bolts of the gate shooting home behind him.

XXXI

BESIEGED

CLIMBING the stairs, Galt entered his room and laid his precious burden on his bed. Standing back, breathing heavily from his labours, he looked down on her with grave concern and a great thankfulness. Never in his life before had he offered a more sincere prayer of thanksgiving to the God of his fathers and the kind fates. What a desperately close thing it had been for Uyuni. She had not spoken since he had raised her from the street ; still unconscious or practically so, for her eyes were closed, she gave scarcely a sign of life except for the distressing little moan that was spasmodically wrung from her parted lips. The tiny pucker of pain between her brows went to his heart ; her face was chalk white. At that moment Galt entertained a strange wish,—if she were only not so white. He would have been delighted to see the healthy bronze which would have stamped her irrevocably as desert born. All barriers were broken, all differences of race and blood forgotten.

He knelt at the bedside and bathed her face, eager to do her humble service, and bring back the glow to her cheek. His hands were as tender as a

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woman's. He cursed the fellow who had made that abominable bruise on her cheek, just beneath the flood of her glorious hair. He became anxious. She seemed such a long time in recovering consciousness. But now the light came, a gentle glow like the opening of a desert dawn; her lids opened slowly and the great troubled, dreamy violet eyes looked wonderingly up at him. He called her softly by name, but her soul was hovering in a dim borderland.

A raucous cry broke on their ears from the street, "Deliver to us the abandoned one, the slave of the Infidel." With that voice a full realisation came to the girl; her eyes assumed an expression of deadly fear, that struck Galt to the heart. She clutched the breast of his tunic, and clung to him. Shelteringly as he would gather a frightened child to his breast, he cast an arm about her, and kissed her cheek.

"You are safe, little Uyuni," he said, "quite safe. Have no fear. You are in my house,—in your home." Softly he smoothed her hair; the dread gradually died from her eyes, and she lay back again, her eyes closed. Noiselessly he slipped from the room to the roof. Here stood his one shebana vigilantly on guard. The rest of the house was silent as the grave. Panic stricken the servants had fled, when Galt had rushed out to the rescue of Uyuni. Only one shebana. It was not much of a guard against the people of El Ragi, but the house was strong, and soon the Gurkhas would come. The pursuers of Uyuni were standing in the street below. Occasionally they cast stones which rattled inef-

fectually against the gate and the walls, and their voices rose and fell as they cursed the Infidel and the slave of the Infidel, but Galt could see that leaderless this mob did not present an immediate danger. The crisis would come when they were joined by the sheikh and the mosque worshippers. There was still that menacing distant hum in the air. Galt gazed into the opaque darkness that wrapped the ruins to the South; through that shrouded desert, he felt certain, were now moving those little dusky warriors of his whom Butras had gone to summon.

Hurrying back to his room he found the daughter of Musa, leaning on her elbow, and anxiously watching for him. As he entered she again lay back on the pillow.

"Are you in very great pain, child?" he asked, "they will be most severely punished for this, the brutes."

"Thou art beside me. I am well, O hakim," replied the child, with a brave little smile.

Galt drew a chair to the bedside.

"You say you are well when I am beside you," he said severely, "will you tell me then, young lady, what you mean by running away from me without a word?"

"Allah knows I was sore afflicted to go," replied Uyuni earnestly.

"Then why did you go?"

A shadow passed across her face.

"The saiyyid my father said to me, 'The people are in great anger because thou, a Muslim, art living

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in the same house with the hakim, the Unbeliever. It is against the law of the Prophet. They will rise and kill him. If you stay with him he will die. We will go together to the desert and the people will forget their anger against the hakim.' Therefore I left thee, effendi. Alas, have I not brought great trouble to thee? The people are at thy gate." Galt's heart was warmed at such self sacrificing loyalty. Taking her hand he said gravely,

"The greatest trouble you can bring to me is to put yourself in danger. You must promise, Uyuni, never to leave me again. Promise."

The sincerity of his words drove away her troubled indecision.

"Yes, O hakim, I promise," she said dutifully.

"How did you get into the hands of that mob?" he asked.

"We went to the cave of the Mahdi, so that the saiyyid my father might pray. Till after nightfall we stayed deep in the heart of the cave for he feared that thou might follow. We saw at the North gate one of thy shebanas who questioned us. When we issued from the cave they saw us,—some coolies, effendi, who brought brushwood on hamar from the desert. We thought not of them and passed on our way to the desert. But one hamar brushed against my father and the ill balanced load fell to the ground. The coolie would have struck my father but I stood between; then his lips uttered many vile names against me. The others jeered, and one cast a stone which struck me on the knee. 'What was that?' my father asked, and I told him. 'Allah,' he said,

'a stone,—a stone to thee, My Eyes,' and more angry than ever I have seen him, he stretched his arms wide and rushed at them. But alas, he is blind, he stumbled and fell face down on the dust, and they mocked him. He called to me, 'Allah forgive me that I brought thee into such danger, My Eyes. O that I was not blind that I might crush them.' But they jeered still more, and more came, and they cast many stones at me. Then my father called me to him and whispered, 'Fly, fly to the great hakim. Have no fear for me, child. It is thee, not me they want. Allah, that I had eyes. Go, my child.' And I ran towards the wall and thee, effendi, but they pursued as thou knowest. More and more joined them till it seemed all El Ragi followed. Some of the shebanas tried to help me, but I fear they were badly hurt, effendi. Many times they struck me." Galt winced. "Here, here, and here." Very frankly as a child she told him where the blows had fallen. "Wallah," she said, drawing a deep breath, "I was glad to see thee, effendi."

"Poor child, you had a narrow escape," said Galt. "You must promise," he repeated, "never to leave me again."

"Yea, O hakim, I promise."

There was a slight commotion behind him, and one of the shebanas whom he had sent to watch the mosque, stood at the doorway. He had apparently come in great haste. The face of the other shebanas showed in the shadows behind. They had climbed the rear wall, he was told, to avoid those who stood at the gate. The mosque was already disgorging its

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people ; soon they would be before the house. They were in an ill mood, and with them was the sheikh. Galt ordered the two men at once to the roof. They were a valuable addition to his pitifully small garrison. The cries in the street had grown in volume and menace ; momentarily the hubbub ceased and a well remembered, heavy voice called loudly for the cowardly dog of an Infidel, the hakim el sivasi to appear.

"Thou wilt not go," said Uyuni fearfully. "It is he. It is the Scorpion. He will kill thee." She clung to him.

Galt smiled reassuringly.

"Do you think I am foolish enough to go down to him in the street. Oh no, Uyuni." He pinched her cheek, "I am going to speak to him from a very safe spot on the roof. Now lie down, and wait till I return. Everything will be all right." But as he climbed the stairs to the roof, and his ears were assailed with the clamour of the fanatical Muslimin, his heart was momentarily chilled. Why was there still no sign of the Gurkhas ? Could it be possible that after all Butras had not passed the guard at the town gate that had fired on him ? But he cast the disquieting thought from him.

It was not a heartening sight that met Galt's gaze as he stood at the edge of the roof. The street beneath him swarmed ; it was crowded with a jostling, swaying, vociferous throng, who were being swept along on a tide of religious mania. As Galt's shadow showed above them, there was an instant's silence, followed by a renewed and greater outburst of male-

diction. For a moment an almost overpowering awe took possession of Galt. It was not the crowd, dangerous as it was, that filled his heart with unmanly fear. It was a realisation of the force that drove them on ; that made those, who yesterday had hailed him as the great friend of the Arab, now his implacable insensate enemies who would beat him to death if he fell into their hands. Across the flat roof loomed the great dome of the Mosque.

Galt drew himself together. He was looking down at those who came within the circle of the light shed from the lamp above the gate. On the outer rim the Scorpion sat astride his horse, the dim figures of his hoshiyah behind him.

"Citizens of El Ragi," Galt called in a loud voice, and the hubbub ceased. "What is the meaning of this clamour at my gate?" He paused an instant. "If you have grievances come to me by day, not like jackals in the night, and I will listen to you. Am I not the hakim el siyasi, the friend of the Arab? Perhaps there are some among you," and he looked down at the sheikh, "who cannot show his face by day."

"Deliver to us the daughter of Musa."

"Who speaks?" Galt asked, though he knew well.

"Aqrab, Sheikh of the Beni Kelb," answered the same voice from the street.

"Ah, the Scorpion. It is as I thought. One who dares not come by day."

"Deliver the woman thou stolest from my harim, to be thy slave against the law of the True Prophet."

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"I stole no one from your harim; nor have I a slave," returned Galt.

"Dost thou deny, dog of an Unbeliever, that even now the daughter of Musa is with thee?"

"Yes, she is here," answered the hakim promptly, while a cry arose from the people. He raised his voice. "The daughter of Musa has been stoned. Do you think I will hand her over to you to be slain?"

He did not know that Uyuni, fearing that the good hakim might be in danger, had crept slowly up the steps and now stood back in the shadows of the roof.

"She will not be slain. She will be stoned no more," said the heavy voice of the Scorpion. "She will be safe and so wilt thou, O hakim. But if thou refuse, Allah pity thee. All El Ragi is at thy gate crying for justice."

The crowd took up the cry, "Deliver to us thy slave, O hakim."

The daughter of Musa, crouching in the shadows, was greatly troubled. The hakim's life was in danger because of her. How could he withstand the onslaught of all the people of El Ragi? With leaden heart she began to walk towards him to plead with him to let her go, when the hakim's voice rang out clear and loud above the bedlam.

"Go all of you to your homes. The daughter of Musa is indeed here, and here she stays. You are men. Is there any one among you who would give up his wife to another? Do you think the hakim el siyasi will give up his?"

The girl, moving towards him out of the shadows, turned rigid. What had she heard? Was she

dreaming? She was hearing voices from another sphere. The people must also have heard, for their cries were dying into a wondering murmur. She looked towards the hakim. He was still there. It was not a dream.

The people were nonplussed at the hakim's astounding statement. This put a new aspect on the situation. They whispered among themselves. The sheikh called out that the hakim lied, that she was his slave, stolen from his own harim, but the crowd were momentarily in a quandary. Galt was trying to hear far off sounds. Would the Gurkhas never come? He had for the instant checked the crowd, but how long would the quiet last? A sudden thought struck him.

"If I lie," he called to the crowd, "let the daughter of Musa speak, let her say if she is my slave."

The idea appealed to the people. "Let us hear the daughter of Musa?" they cried.

"I will bring her," said the hakim.

"I am here, effendi," said a very small voice behind him. "Allah, I know not what this means."

"You have heard, daughter of Musa," said Galt aloud while the crowd listened. "Speak." But the girl could utter not a sound. Her whole universe was swaying. The hakim, before all the people, had called her his wife, and now he seemed actually to mean it. The hakim spread his arms, and with a murmured "Alhamdulillah" she moved slowly into their shelter. They formed a clear shadow against

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the lamplight behind. Certainly here was a sufficient answer and the people again fell silent.

Folded in his arms the girl whispered :

"Thou canst not mean it, effendi. I must dream. Allah, I must not wake. Thy wife?—Thy wife?" She spoke the word with reverence. For answer Galt bent and kissed her.

XXXII

THE SAIYID

THE respite gained by Galt's dramatic announcement was not long lived. The sheikh, rising in wrath in his stirrups, called on all Muslimin to hear him. The daughter of Musa was a Muslim; the hakim was an Infidel. Did not the Koran forbid the mating of a True Believer with an Unbeliever? The hakim had poisoned the mind of the girl with the idolatries of the Nasrani, who worships false Gods. Would the followers of the True Prophet submit to this sacrilege? And again the fickle crowd, their fanaticism fanned into flame, began to cry out against the Infidel. The clouds again looked threatening.

Uyuni listened with a sinking heart. It was not that she felt it wrong, despite the Koran's teaching, to become the bride of a Nasrani. She would willingly have followed the great hakim to the end of the earth. But now she saw more clearly than ever the great gulf between them, unbridgeable, deep as the Pit.

"Thou canst not marry an Arab, effendi," she said in a low voice, drawing back from his arms.

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"Child," said the hakim earnestly, "were you ten times an Arab you would be my wife."

The cries of the crowd in the street grew louder; stones battered against the gate; the full throaty sinister voice of the Muslim throng filled the air, and rose under the stars. Galt strained his ears for another sound that would mean that the Gurkhas were at hand. They were very long in coming. A rifle bullet struck the wall at Galt's feet and he hurriedly drew Uyuni back into shelter. The shot was not repeated, but the noises in the street redoubled, with clattering blows on the gate. Luckily it was heavily buttressed, built to repel the raids of thieves. The shebanas from the roof fired into the crowd, and they drew back leaving a body huddled beneath the light. Galt grew anxious. With the people in their present mood it would not be long before the house would be invaded; his arm tightened about Uyuni.

A resolution came to Galt. It would simply be an expedient to gain time, but it might be efficacious. He would tell the people the story of Uyuni's birth. He would show them that though she was bred a Muslim she was born a Nasrani. He was certain that many would scoff at the tale, but it might give a further respite. If it did not serve . . . he must fight to the last. He felt cold at the thought of Uyuni in the hands of that mob.

Relief came from an unexpected quarter. Even as he moved towards the edge, with Uyuni striving to keep him back in shelter, a sonorous voice broke on the night air, heavy, monotonous and weary unto death, but instinct with the mystery of the desert,

and the fatalistic teaching of the Muslim. The words broke on the noise of the rabble like a voice from another sphere.

"If she is a Nasrani, it is the will of Allah. Maktub. It is written."

Galt gazed into the street; a sudden silence had fallen at the blasphemous speech. At the head of the sheikh's horse the saiyyid stood, his tall, bent form, now erect, defiant, breasting the storm. Galt wondered how alone and unaided he had found his way through the ruins from the cave of the Mahdi, but the words he had just heard filled him with hope.

"Praise be to Allah, the Compassionate, the Forgiving, King of the Day of Judgment," continued the saiyyid. "Whence come you, children of El Ragi? Why do you whine and bark like jackals in the streets? Get you to your homes and pray Allah to forgive you for this night's work."

"Thou dost not understand, thou blind fool," said the sheikh wrathfully.

"I have heard. Praise be to Allah," was the astounding reply of the saiyyid.

"Art thou djinn possessed? Art thou too a Nasrani?"

"Nay," boomed the old man.

"Is it not written that a Believer may not wed with an Infidel?"

"Yea, it is written, but she who is called Uyuni is not a Muslim."

"Thy daughter not a Muslim," cried the incensed

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Scorpion. "Allah, give thee peace, thou doddering one."

"She is not my daughter, O Scorpion."

The people who had listened in silence began to murmur. The ancient Koran teacher had gone mad. Was he not speaking of the girl who daily for many years had led his blind footsteps to the mosque? Truly he had lived too long, for while his body still lived, his mind had decayed.

"Alas," whispered Uyuni brokenly to Galt, "the saiyid, my father, is truly mad," but Galt, with his arm still about her, answered, "Listen, Uyuni," and wondering what it all meant she listened.

"Out of the way, thou old imbecile," said the sheikh, but the saiyid, groping with his blind hands, laid hold of the Scorpion's horse's bridle, and raising one hand stilled the growing tumult.

"Hear, men of El Ragi. Allah, I have kept the secret well. Not one among you knows, not even thou, O Scorpion, though day by day she walked among you and her hair is golden like millet sheaves. I have kept it well locked here, and here it would have rested until this old body rotted in the grave, but to-night you stoned her." His voice was hoarse in denunciation, and the people drew back, leaving a wider circle with the Scorpion alone beside her. "The fires of Iblis consume you, you vermin who are not fit to bathe her feet. Daily she has led me to the mosque; she has cooked my rice; she has been My Eyes, My Eyes. Even so I have called her; yet her name I know not. Do you think this parchment hide could breed the milk skin of her cheek? You

have heard that her mother was Asma, my wife. Even so I have told you. Asma was brought to bed with child, but Izrail called it away even as it drew its first breath. In its stead I took the child Uyuni. I said she is born a Nasrani but she will be trained in the True Faith. I have taught her diligently, and not to a single one have I told the truth till now. But you have stoned her,—may jackals gnaw your bones—and the truth must now be told."

"Do you hear, Uyuni?" Galt asked, but the girl looked at him dumb, with wide eyes.

"What mad tale is this, begotten in the fogs of thy feeble mind?" cried the sheikh. "If the girl is not thine, then who gave her birth?"

"Dost thou forget, O Scorpion," and the crowd listened expectantly, "the one who came years ago from distant lands, to delve in the ruins of this old city, an unhallowed task which brought him ill luck, even as thou must remember, O sheikh? Dost thou forget that he was slain in the night at the great desert tomb? Nay, I think that thou hast not forgotten, nor hast thou forgotten the woman, his wife, with hair as golden as the millet sheaves, who embraced the river bed rather than be thine. Like calls to like. The dove mates with the dove, not the rook. Even as it was with the mother, so it is now with the daughter. Allah, Allah," cried the old man, putting his hands on his breast, as if begging forgiveness for allowing Uyuni to stray from the fold of the True Faith, "they stoned her, they stoned her."

"Is this true, effendi?" breathed the girl.

"Yes, child, it is true," said the hakim.

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"I found her in the dawn," ended the saiyid, "at the foot of the tomb. I heard a child's wail and found her torn by a scimitar blade, where thou had cast her, O Scorpion."

"See," said Galt to Uyuni, "the djinn who struck you, Uyuni, the djinn of the tomb." It was quite easy to understand how the hideous experience of that night so many years ago had been distorted in the mists of her childish mind. But the girl was not thinking of the djinn of her imaginings.

"Drowned . . . drowned . . . " she murmured. She was pondering with almost superstitious awe of the unknown mother who had escaped the Scorpion only through death.

As the saiyid had spoken, a marked change had come over the Muslimin in the street. Deep in their hearts they held a great respect for the old Koran teacher. They knew that the story he had told was true, that the girl was Nasrani born. They began to feel shame that the girl had been stoned, and that they had come boisterously clamouring at the gate of the good hakim, the friend of the Arabs. Gradually the crowd began to disintegrate; it slowly thinned and melted away. Galt's heart warmed as he looked down. He could see that all danger save from the sheikh and his hoshiyah had passed; he saw further that the day was saved and caught a glimpse through the fading clouds of a bright future among these people with whom he would be working with Uyuni by his side. He felt grateful to the saiyid, and marvelled at the great love which had overcome his fanatical zeal for his religion. Her injuries at the

hands of the mob had broken down all barriers. Galt realised what a heavy sacrifice the saiyyid had made.

He straightened. There was a new sound in the air that brought a cry of exultation from his lips. An alarm was raised in the street below and as if by magic it was cleared, as a little band of Gurkhas rushed towards the sheikh and his hoshiyah. They had no quarrel with the fleeing Arabs of the town and paid no heed to them. The hoshiyah swept down the street in mad career. In the melee, deserted, alone, helpless in his blindness, the saiyyid was cast down and trodden under the flying hoofs. Uyuni uttered a cry of horror, and Galt with a shebana ran into the street. Raising the saiyyid gently they carried him into the courtyard and laid him on some rugs. He was clearly in a desperate condition; his breathing was laboured and fitful, and it seemed to Galt as if the spark of life would at any moment go out. The lips muttered fragments of suras of the Koran. "The mountains shall be as carded wool in the wind." Despite her own injuries Uyuni was almost instantly at his side, eager to minister to him, while her tears flowed unheeded. Galt felt almost as an interloper as he watched this pitiful picture of great love.

There was a heavy knocking at the gate, and Galt opened to a Gurkha officer. All was well, the young fellow reported. A guard of Gurkhas had been placed at the gates of the town and as the sheikh and his hoshiyah had tried to escape to the desert through the North gate, the kukri of a little soldier

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had taken its toll. It was the sheikh only who had been killed but the spirits of the Havildar and his men could rest in peace.

XXXIII

SUNSET AND DAWN

A WEEK had passed since the epoch-making night when the great hakim had called her his wife before all the people, but there was a disagreeable, small fly in the ointment of Uyuni's love. She could not drive away the vision of a fair creature on whose lips was perched gossamer laughter as light as a butterfly's wing. How could she hope to keep the love of the hakim when one so beautiful waited for him across the seas? With a little fluttering spasm of jealousy she watched each day for a sign that would tell that he had received some word from her of the photo. One morning she came upon him reading a letter at his breakfast, and an ill divining soul told her whence it had come. Her jealousy flamed on the instant.

"It is from she who waits for thee. She bids thee come. I will not keep thee," she said. "Go to her."

The hakim looked up and laughed dryly as he rose and stretched out his arms.

"She waits no more, Uyuni."

"Alas she is dead. Forgive thy erring servant, effendi," said the girl contritely.

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"Well, no, not exactly dead, but she waits no more. She has found another, Uyuni."

She shook her head incredulously. It could not be. Then with a slow smile dawning in her eyes, she whispered,

"Thou dost still wish to marry thy Arab?"

His answer was sufficient. From his arms she looked up, "A man has but one wife in thy land?" she asked jealously. He nodded smilingly. "Praise be to Allah," said Uyuni.

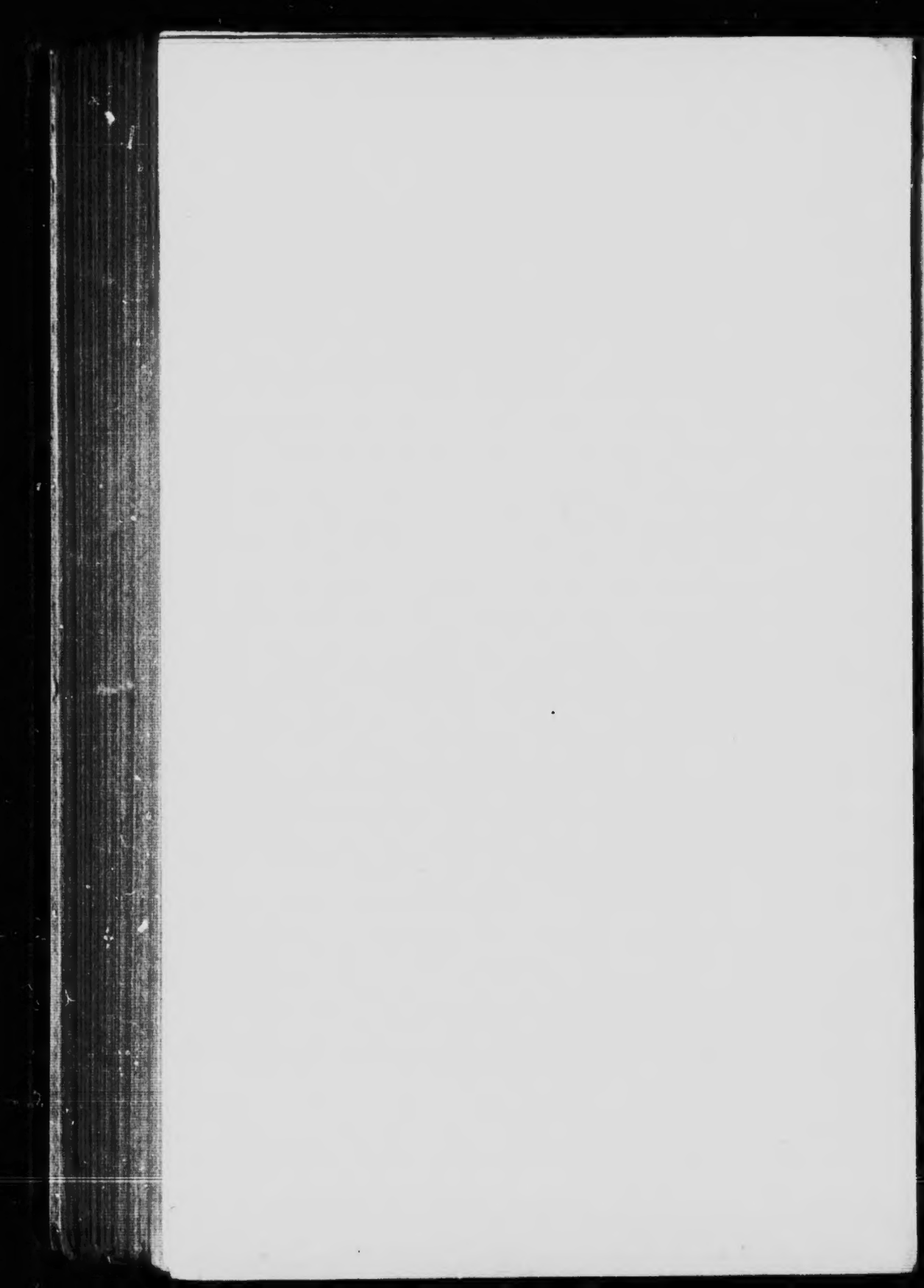
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Under tender, loving care the saiyyid's life had been prolonged. The spark of life was kept alight by the fire of the spirit. Broken in body, day after day he lay on his couch in the hakim's house scarcely moving, but one dawn he rose and called loudly for Uyuni. She hastened to him from her apartment in alarm.

"Thou art late, late, My Eyes," said the old man. "Already I feel the warmth of the day in the air. Lead me to the cave of the Mahdi." The last few days were forgotten, he was living his old self. He seemed under the strain of some great excitement, some exaltation that had given him strength. Earnestly Uyuni begged him to lie again on his couch; she said he was too weak to walk, that with the exertion he would die, but he caught her almost roughly by the shoulders. "Lead me," he commanded, "it is the day of Disorder. To-day He will come." Nothing could gainsay him. Again the suq

heard the familiar cry, "Balak, saiyid Musa, (Out of the way for Saiyid Musa)." But the girl's voice broke and her heart was heavy within her, for the old man was weary and the shadow of death was on his face. Soon he must answer the questioning Angels of the Tomb, Munkir and Nakir. But nothing could persuade him to return to his rest. Leaning heavily on the girl's shoulder, and grimly fighting the heavy hand that was dragging him down, he at length reached the cave. With sad eyes Uyuni watched him. At the cave's mouth he prostrated himself, almost falling, and the dark arches began to stir to the rhythm of his prayer. What intensity of feeling lay in that sonorous voice, to-day, what anguished appeal, what supreme devotion and faith. On a sudden the old man stretched forth his arms, while a great light shone on his face.

"Hail, Imam," he cried aloud and sank slowly forward on his face.



GLOSSARY

Batan mal hosh	-	Courtyard
Binet	-	Little girl
Cherid	-	Old fashioned irrigation machine in use on Tigris and Euphrates
Dukkan	-	Shop
Gahwa	-	Coffee house, coffee
Ghema	-	Arab tent
Hakim el askeri	-	Military Governor
Hakim el siyasi	-	Political Officer
Hakuma	-	Government
Hajji	-	One who has made pilgrimage to Mecca
Haleb	-	Aleppo
Hoshiyah	-	Bodyguard
Inshallah	-	God willing
Jinabek	-	A title of respect
Khanjar	-	Dagger
Kafieh	-	Type of head-dress
La illaha illa Allah wa Muhammad er rasul Allah		There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Apostle of God
Muy yuhalif	-	Very well
Mahdi	-	Divine Leader
Numi hulu	-	Sweet lime
Nahar	-	Irrigation ditch
Naghilah	-	Turkish pipe

Ra'i belediyah	-	-	Mayor of town
Shebana	-	-	Arab police
Saiyid	-	-	Descendant of the Prophet
Saraf	-	-	Money changer
Suf	-	-	Wool
Sekkin	-	-	Knife
Terjaman	-	-	Interpreter
Ugal	-	-	Rings of wool or camel hair worn about head
Yashmagh	-	-	Head kerchief
Zubun	-	-	Robe
Zulaya	-	-	Carpet

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